

PLAIN SERMONS

on

Portions from the Old and New Testament Scriptures

By

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With a Greeting to the Reader by Prof. W. H. T. Dau, D.D.,
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*God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord
Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I
unto the world.* *Galatians 6, 14.*



CONCORDIA PUBLISHING HOUSE
ST. LOUIS MO.
1925.

Louis Lange Publishing Company Print.

To the Christian Reader — Greeting:

Even if the author had not chosen the title under which this latest series of sermons goes forth, everyone who knows him by his past offerings, and everyone who may first become acquainted with him by this collection of sermons would call these sermons what he has called them. The quality of plainness, perspicuity, simplicity has been a characteristic of the best and most efficient preaching in the Lutheran Church. In one of her Confessions [Smalcald Articles] the Lutheran Church declares its belief that people become attached to the Church only by "good preaching." The context shows that "good preaching" is preaching such as the people, common, ordinary men can grasp and that ministers directly to their needs. Luther started this kind of preaching: he declared it to his pulpit polity, not to address himself to the learned professors from the Wittenberg University in his audience, Dr. Pommer, Dr. Jonas, and Magister Philip, but to such simple folk as his daughters Magdalen and Elsie and his little Johnny. He reasoned that if these would understand him all the rest would. Luther praised his friends Link and Dietrich because the common people learned much from their sermons, and for the same reason he commended Magister Moerlin. But the great display which Bucer and Zwingli made in their pulpit of their learning and oratorical powers thoroughly disgusted Luther. He laid it down as a general rule that no haughty, conceited, proud person can be a good preacher; for in a good preacher, he held, there must be a crushed and contrite heart and a meek and humble spirit.

Luther's method of arranging his sermonic material—his homiletic method—was as plain and simple as his delivery. He said: When I have to preach I do not draw up an elaborate and detailed account of what I am going to say, but I sketch the principal points and dwell on them. Success in preaching, he said, comes when you divide your subject well, explain its meaning and importance, and conclude by drawing the proper conclusions, that is, by making practical applications to the hearers.

All these qualities of a good sermon are found in Reverend Hartenberger's sermons, also in the collection herewith submitted. May they be blessed, as their predecessors were, to thousands who have read and reread them!

W. H. T. DAU.

St. Louis, Mo.

May 28, 1925.

To the Kind Reader:

In brotherly love the author dedicates this volume of sermons to his coworkers in the Lord's Kingdom with these words of the great Apostle St. Paul:

Therefore, seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not, but have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the Word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. But if our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost; in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine upon them. For we preach not ourselves, but Jesus Christ the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darknes, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us. (2 Cor. 4, 1—7.)

THE AUTHOR.

Red Bud, Illinois,
May 28, 1925.

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First Sunday in Advent.

Psalm 24, 7—10.

Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of Glory shall come in. Who is this King of Glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of Glory shall come in. Who is this King of Glory? The Lord of hosts, He is the King of Glory.

Today we begin a new church year; let us begin it in the name of the Lord. Today the portals of a new church year are opened to us; let us enter in with grateful hearts and doxologies. Today the grace of God comes to us in all its old sweetness and power; let us not despise, nor reject it.

During the old church year God's blessings have been many. In His loving-kindness He gave to every one of us all that we needed for the support of our body and soul. His spiritual blessings especially were most abundant. During the old church year not less than one hundred and thirty-two services were held in this house of the Lord. In all these services the Word of God was preached in its purity. It was preached in both, the German and the English language. That is, indeed, a special blessing for which all of us should be grateful, and all of us should acknowledge the kindness and love of our heavenly Father by being diligent in our church attendance during this new church year. The blessed Sacraments also were frequently administered in this sanctuary of the Lord during the old church year. All of us, who diligently and believingly used the Word of God and the blessed Sacraments, were made surer of the forgiveness of our sins; our faith was strengthened; our crosses became lighter as our Christian hopes increased. Indeed, God has been very gracious unto every one of us during the church year just ended!

We have not deserved such divine blessings; on the contrary, we only deserved God's wrath and displeasure, temporal death, and eternal damnation on account of our manifold sins.

Today we have begun a new church year. What has it in store for us, my beloved friends? We cannot tell, as we cannot know the future. But this we do know, that in this new church year, too, we shall often sin against God and our fellows, and that we deserve nothing but God's wrath and punishment on account

of our sins. Our shortcomings and sins trouble us very much, for we Christians do not want to sin. We often fear that God will set His face against us, and that He will withdraw from us His blessings, both spiritual and material. And what should become of us, if God should withdraw from us His grace and loving-kindness? What should we do in days of trouble, trials, temptations, bereavements, and in the hour of our death, if God should forsake us? Oh, beloved friends, we should be the most miserable of all creatures! But, glory and adoration be to the gracious Lord, for He will not forsake us; He will never depart from us. No; He is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him (Ps. 103). That this is indeed very true, we see from our text. It is a very appropriate text for this Sunday, the new year's day of the Christian Church. It is a soul-inspiring message which the Psalmist brings to us, for he tells us of the coming of the *King of Glory*, and he exhorts us to accept Him as the God of our salvation. In accordance with our text, and by the assistance of the Holy Spirit, let us now listen attentively and prayerfully to the joyous message of the Psalmist:—

Behold, the King of Glory Cometh unto Thee!

Let me show,

1. *Who this King of Glory really is; and*
2. *How every one of us should receive Him.*

1.

Our text, beloved fellow-Christians, was written and sung by the great prophet-king of the Old Testament, by King David, the second king of the Israelites. He wrote it by divine inspiration (Ps. 45, 1). In the first portion of this Psalm we have a doxology, a song of praise. In it King David sings of the gracious and wonderful works of the Lord. All things are His, because He made them all by the power of His word. If we behold the many creatures in this world, beloved friends, we must, most assuredly, join the great prophet-king of the Old Testament in singing doxologies unto the Creator of the universe, for He is a wonderful God.

In the second portion of this Psalm David tells the Israelites, whom the Lord will receive and bless. He praises the name of the Lord, because He accepted the children of Israel as His own

people, and because they enjoyed His blessings from the days of bondage and servitude in Egypt to the days of liberty and prosperity, which they now were enjoying.

In the third portion of this Psalm, in our text, David proclaims the joyous message unto his fellow-men that the gracious Lord is coming to them, and he admonishes them to receive this King of Glory as the God of their salvation, for he jubilantly cries out: *"Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of Glory shall come in. Who is this King of Glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of Glory shall come in. Who is this King of Glory? The Lord of hosts, He is the King of Glory."*

Whom does King David mean by the *King of Glory*? Many believe that he means the Father, the first person of the Holy Trinity, for, say they, David knew not of the three persons in the Godhead. But, beloved friends, all those, who think and speak thus, err; for King David, indeed, knew of the three persons in the Godhead, as many of his Psalms prove. (See: Ps. 2; 8; 33; 110.)

The King of Glory, of whom the great prophet-king is singing in our text, is none other than the promised Savior of sinful mankind, Jesus Christ, the second person of the Holy Trinity. That this is true, we see from the writings of the holy evangelists and apostles of the Lord Jesus. Today's Gospel-lesson* tells us of the triumphant entry of Jesus Christ into the city of Jerusalem. In the same St. Matthew says: "And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, unto the Mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples, saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her; loose them, and bring them unto Me. And if any man say ought unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them and straightway he will send them. All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, Tell ye the Daughter of Zion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee!" (See also John 12, 14.) We Christians are sure that the divinely inspired writers of the New Testament understood the prophecies of the Old Testament perfectly well,—for the Holy Ghost could not contradict Himself,—and, that they never would have attributed to the Son, what the prophet-king in our text

* See: Matthew 21, 1—9.

would have attributed to the Father. There cannot be the least doubt in any Christian's mind about the fact that Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of sinful mankind, is the King of Glory, spoken of by King David in our text.

And, furthermore, what David says of the King of Glory can be said only of Jesus Christ, for he says that the King of Glory is the *Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle*. I ask, Who was He that overcame the devil and his infernal associates? Who was He that bruised the head of Satan, that is, overpowered him in that mighty battle for the possession of mankind? Who was He that redeemed sinful and lost men from sin, death and condemnation? Was it not Jesus Christ, the one and only Redeemer of the world? Again I ask, Who was He that came down from heaven in order to take the place of the sinners? Who fulfilled the divine Law perfectly for all sinners? Who suffered and died for all sinners, so that all might live eternally? The answer to all these questions we find on every page of the New Testament. All evangelists and apostles of the Lord Jesus with one accord ascribe unto *Jesus Christ* the redemption of the sinful and lost world. No one that understands anything about the Holy Scriptures at all will deny that this is a blessed fact.

Again, King David says of the King of Glory, that He is the *Lord of hosts*. Who is the Lord of hosts, my beloved friends? None other than Jesus Christ. When He had ascended into heaven after He had finished His great work of redemption, His Father said unto Him: "Sit Thou at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool." Ps. 110, 1. Yea, at His coronation His Father put all things under His feet (Ps. 8, 7; 1 Cor. 15, 27; Heb. 2, 8); and, therefore, His Father also appointed Him to be the Judge of the quick and the dead on the Day of Judgment (Acts 10, 42). All this proves that Jesus Christ is the Lord of hosts, spoken of by David in our text.

The King of Glory, the Lord strong and mighty in battle; the Lord of hosts, Jesus Christ, comes to us today anew, my beloved fellow-Christians. He comes to us in His Word and Sacraments. O joyous message this! He comes to forgive us all our sins, if we will put all confidence in Him alone and in His work of redemption. He comes to help us in all our needs of body and soul, if we will only trust Him alone. He comes to us with manifold material and spiritual blessings, for He Himself has promised: "In all places where I record My name I will come unto

thee, and I will bless thee." O joyous message, this Advent-message, *Behold, the King of Glory cometh unto thee!*

What should you and I do, my beloved friends? We should receive the King of Glory as the God of our salvation with a truly penitent and believing heart. Of this I shall now speak to you in the second place.

2.

Kind David cries out in our text: "*Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of Glory shall come in!*"

As you know, the city of Jerusalem, like many other ancient cities, was surrounded by a high wall. In this wall there were gates or doors. Before each gate there was a portcullis,* that is, a grating or framework made of strong bars of wood or iron. Whenever a king came to the city, the keeper of the gate, through which the king was to enter in, would not only open the gate, but he would also lift up the portcullis as far as it was possible. This was done in order to show unto the king that the people of the city wanted to welcome and honor him. If it was generally known to the people that their own king was to enter in, they went to meet him with patriotic songs and the national salute. This was done especially, if the king came home as a victor from some great battle.

David, of course, is speaking figuratively in our text when he cries out: "*Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of Glory shall come in!*" He wishes to tell the Israelites that they should not only open the door, but even the portcullis of their hearts, that is, they should open their hearts as far as they possibly could for the King of Glory, and that they should receive Him confidently and gladly as the God of their salvation. In the words of a Christian hymnologist, he wishes to say to them:—

O happy hearts and happy homes
To whom this King in triumph comes!
The cloudless Sun of joy He is,
Who bringeth pure delight and bliss.

* "A grating or framework made of strong bars of wood or iron, sharp-pointed at the lower end, sliding vertically in grooves on either side of the portal of a fortified place, and so adjusted as to be let fall swiftly and suddenly in case of surprise to protect the gate from assault." *Standard Dictionary*.

We praise Thee, Spirit, now,
Our Comforter art Thou.

Fling wide the portals of your heart;
Make it a temple set apart
From earthly use for heaven's employ,
Adorned with prayer, and love, and joy;
So shall our Sovereign enter in,
And new and nobler life begin.

Indeed, beloved friends, that is what we must do. We must receive the King of Glory, Jesus Christ, the Savior of sinful men, with an open heart. It is not enough that we simply go to meet Him. In today's Gospel-lesson St. Matthew tells us that, when Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem, many people went out to meet Him. They even spread their garments and branches from trees in His way; yea, they even chanted to Him this beautiful chant: "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" But most of them did not do what the great Psalmist David in our text says that all should do: They did not open unto Him their hearts they did not receive Him as the God of their salvation with a penitent and believing heart. A few days hence they cried into the ears of Pontius Pilate, the governor of Judea: "Let Him be crucified! His blood be on us, and on our children!" His coming to them had been in vain.

Behold, the King of Glory cometh unto thee! This joyous message I can bring you today, for He comes to every one of us assembled here. As truly as His Word is preached and His blessed Sacraments are administered here this day, so surely the King of Glory is here, for He is ever present in His means of grace: His Word and Sacraments. All of us should gratefully and cheerfully accept Him as the God of our salvation, as our Redeemer-King. This we do, if we truly repent of our great and manifold sins, and if we trust in Him, in His work of redemption. It is His wish and desire that we do that. He comes to us with His gracious invitation: "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Matt. 11, 28. If you will only go to Him *heavy laden*, that is, with a contrite and believing heart, He will in no wise cast you out (John 6, 37), no: He will accept you as His own; He will enter your heart, and He will dwell there, for He dwells in the heart of every true believer in Him. And He, being in your heart, will govern all your thoughts, desires, and affections; He, being in your heart, will direct all your

words and actions; He, being in your heart, will give you strength to do that what is pleasing to Him, so that His name is glorified, and your eternal weal is made secure. You will then begin this new church year with joy and certain hopes of everlasting life. He will bless you with spiritual and temporal gifts, for time and eternity, for your body and your soul. And, if it should please Him to take you out of this world during this new church year, He will grant to you a blessed end, that is, a gracious departure from this "vale of tears" and a joyful entry into the eternal house of His Father, not made with hands. And there you will forever be with Him, the King of Glory, and with His Father, and with the Holy Spirit, and in the company of all the heavenly hosts. Oh, how blessed you will then be! Until you have reached this blessed goal, my dearly beloved fellow-Christian, let this be your daily prayer:—

Redeemer come! I open wide
My heart to Thee; here, Lord, abide!
Let me Thy inner presence feel,
Thy grace and love in me reveal;
Thy Holy Spirit guide us on,
Until our glorious goal be won!

Amen.

Second Sunday in Advent.

Genesis 3, 15. •

I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her Seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise His heel.

We are now living in the season of Advent. This season has been observed by the Christian Church from a very early period. During the same we Christians contemplate the divine prophecies concerning the coming of the promised Messiah or Savior into the flesh, in order to prepare our hearts for a blessed celebration of the joyous festival of Christmas. It is, indeed, a praiseworthy custom to observe the season of Advent for such a good purpose.

Many so-called Christians contend that Christian people should discard the Old Testament Scriptures altogether, because they had nothing to say of Jesus Christ, the one and only Savior of mankind. But people, who think and speak thus, err; for the Old Testament is full of passages which speak of Jesus Christ. For this very reason Jesus Himself told the Jews of His time, who had only the Old Testament Scriptures, that they should search the Scriptures, because they testify of Him (John 5, 29). Yes, we have many passages in the Old Testament Scriptures which speak of Jesus Christ. All the prophets, from Moses to Malachi, have written of Him. And it is well for us to direct our attention to these prophecies, for if we find that they have been fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus, our faith in Him will be strengthened.

By the mouth and pen of the prophets of old, God did not only foretell that He would send a Savior, but He also foretold *when, where, and of whom* the Savior should be born. In our text we have the very first promise of God concerning the Savior of the world. Without this promise Adam and Eve and their posterity could not have been eternally saved. Let us now contemplate this precious promise. By the assistance of the Holy Spirit, and in accordance with our text, let me now direct your devout attention to:—

The First Gospel-Message Heard by Poor Sinners.

Let me speak,

1. *Of its blessed contents; and*
2. *Of its soul-saving power.*

1.

God says in our text: *"I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her Seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise His heel."*

These words were first spoken by God in the Garden of Eden. As you know, God had created Adam and Eve in perfect holiness and perfect righteousness, that is, without sin. When they came forth out of the Creator's hand, they were sinless. God placed them in a most beautiful garden, which is known as the Garden of Eden. In this garden there were many fruit-bearing trees. God said to Adam: "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it; for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." God gave this absolute commandment unto man in order to prove him. But what happened? The devil tempted Adam and Eve, saying to the woman: "Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" The woman answered: "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die." The devil said to her: "Ye shall not surely die; for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." And the woman believed the devil. She saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, and she took of the fruit, and she did eat, and she gave also unto her husband, and he also ate of the forbidden fruit. Thus they had transgressed the commandment of the Lord; they had sinned. And their eyes were opened, and they realized that they had sinned against God, and they were afraid of the Lord, for they feared death. Yea, "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin." Rom. 5, 12.

After the Fall the Lord came to Adam and Eve, and He chided them for their transgression, but He also had compassion upon the poor deluded sinners, and He preached the saving Gospel unto them. This He did when He spoke the words contained in our text to the devil. He said to him: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her Seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise His heel." This was the very first Gospel-message that was heard by poor sinners. What did this precious message contain?

The Lord speaks of the *woman's Seed*. What did He mean to say? Whom did He understand by the *Seed* of the woman? By the woman's Seed He did not mean the natural offspring of Adam and Eve, not one of their natural children. By the woman's Seed He meant the Savior of the world. He wanted to say, that He would save them and their posterity by the Promised One, who was to come from a woman after the flesh, not in a natural, but in a supernatural manner. In other words, He wanted to tell them that He Himself would send His only-begotten Son, being born of a woman, into this world in order to redeem sinful mankind. By the Seed of the woman the Godman Savior Jesus Christ is meant. That this is true, we see from the prophecy of the Prophet Isaiah. He prophesied: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel." Is. 7, 14. And that this son of the virgin is the Godman Savior of the world, we see from this passage of Isaiah's prophecy: "Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder. And His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever." Is. 9, 6. 7. And St. Paul writes: "When the fulness of time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the Law, to redeem them that were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." Gal. 4, 4. 5.

What did God Himself say of this Seed of the woman? He said, that *He should bruise the devil's head, and that the devil should bruise His heel.*

What does that mean, beloved friends? That means, that the Savior should overcome Satan, take away from him his power, but that at the same time Satan should bruise His heel, that is, that the dear Savior should suffer and die.

What God Himself foretold in this first Gospel-message, all came true; it was all fulfilled. Jesus of Nazareth, the Godman Savior of the sinful world, had to suffer and die in order to redeem mankind of sin, death, and the power of the devil. From the accounts of the holy evangelists and apostles we learn that Jesus suffered untold agonies in His body and soul when He was in the garden of Gethsemane; before the Jewish Council; before Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor; before King Herod Antipas,

and on the cross on Calvary. His sufferings were so intense that His sweat was like drops of blood. And how terrible was the scourging which He suffered at the hands of cruel Roman soldiers! And, finally, having been nailed to the accursed tree of the cross, and hanging upon it, His suffering became so great, that He cried out: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" And after He had been hanging on the cross for six long hours, He gave up the ghost and died. Right then and there He was bruised by Satan; right then and there this saying of God the Father in our text, "*And thou shalt bruise His heel,*" was literally fulfilled.

But that was not all. In His sufferings and death He bruised Satan's head, that is, He overcame the Wicked One. When Jesus suffered and died on the cross, He, through His sufferings and death, brought in an everlasting salvation for all sinful mankind; He snatched sinful men from the fangs of the hellish serpent; He trod Satan under foot, that is, He took from him his infernal power over men. Right then and there the saying of the heavenly Father in our text: "*It (the Seed of the woman, the Savior) shall bruise thy head,*" was fulfilled. The first Gospel-message heard by sinful men, contained this truth: The Savior shall suffer and die, but by His sufferings and death He shall overcome the power of Satan, and redeem poor sinners from sin, death, and eternal damnation. Indeed, a blessed message for poor sinners! Without it Adam and Eve and their posterity would have despaired in life and death, and they would have been eternally lost.

The first Gospel-message of God the Father: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her Seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise His heel," was the only Gospel-message known to the people of the first world, that is, to the people that lived before the Noachian deluge. It was a very short message, but it contained the gist of the whole Gospel of Jesus Christ. It assured sinful man that God would send His Son as Savior, and that He, through His sufferings and death, would overcome the power of the devil, and redeem all sinners from sin, death, and condemnation. And therefore it was a power of God unto salvation. To this blessed truth I shall now call your attention in the second place.

2.

St. Paul says: "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ; for it is a power of God unto salvation to every one that

believeth." Rom. 1, 16. These words of St. Paul are not only true of the Gospel in all its *brilliant fulness*, but also *in nuce*, in its most condensed form, as found in our text.

The first Gospel-message proved its saving power, for Adam and Eve and many of their posterity believed it, and were eternally saved. That this is true, we see from the Holy Scriptures.

In the fourth chapter of Genesis we are told that, when Eve had given birth to Cain, she cried out that she had gotten a *man* from the Lord.* She, of course, did not wish to say that she had given birth to a *man-child*, as Higher Criticism would make us believe, but she wanted to say, that now the Promised One, the Savior, had been born. She and Adam believed that Cain was the Savior, but, of course, they erred. Nevertheless, beloved friends, we see that they believed the first Gospel-message, which they had received after the Fall. And all the saints in those early days believed that the promised Savior would come. Of Lamech, the father of Noah, we are told, that he jubilantly cried out at the birth of his son: "This same shall comfort us!" Gen. 5, 29. Lamech also erred when he believed that his son Noah was that promised Messiah or Seed of the woman, of whom his forefathers had told him that He was to come to save His people, and to comfort them in all their trials and tribulations. But from these words of Lamech it becomes evident that he also believed the first Gospel-message. This can truthfully be said also of Noah and his family.

After the Noachian deluge the Lord appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and told them that the Messiah should come from them according to the flesh. And they believed this promise of God with all their heart. Jacob, for instance, when he was on his death-bed, believingly cried out: "I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord!" Gen. 49, 18. And also the prophets of old all prophesied of the coming of the Seed of the woman, the Messiah, the Savior of sinful mankind. From Moses to Malachi various prophecies concerning the coming of Messiah were made. God did

* *Luther* translated this passage thus: "Ich habe den Mann, den HERRn." The *Hirschberger Bible* makes this comment: "Ei! Gott sei gelobet, da habe ich erlangt den HERRn, den Mann, den Samen, der dem Satan, der höllischen Schlange, den Kopf zertreten soll, der wird's tun." The exact translation is: "I have gotten a man, Jehovah," that is, *Lord and God*. Eve was persuaded that her first-born son was the promised Savior, and, therefore, she called his name *Cain*, which means, *possession*.

not only renew His promise concerning the coming of the Savior, but He also designated the *place*, where He should be born, and the *time*, in which He was to come; yea, He even said by the mouth of the Prophet Isaiah, *of whom* He should be born (Is. 7, 14). Yes, even more. The heavenly Father also foretold by the mouth of Isaiah of the sufferings and death of Messiah, and of the coming of the Gentile world unto Him as unto the God of their salvation. And the prophets, and many of those people who heard them and read their prophecies, truly believed every one of the divine promises that were made concerning the Seed of the woman. Through faith in Him they were saved. Yes, the Gospel-messages of the Old Testament were the rod and the staff which upheld them in their troubles, both spiritual and physical. Without these Gospel-messages they would have despaired, and have been eternally lost. These divine Gospel-messages, which they truly believed, saved them. These Gospel-proclamations proved themselves to be God's power unto salvation to every one who believed them with all his heart. It was then, as it is now. Without the Gospel no one can be eternally saved, and for this reason Jesus Himself enjoined His disciples to go into all the world, and teach the Gospel to all men (Mark 16, 15).

The Gospel has the very same soul-saving power in this day. Wherever it is preached and taught, there its power manifests itself. Our missionaries go out into all the world, and they preach and teach the Gospel to the heathen people, that is, to people, who wallow in all kinds of shame and vices. The preaching of the Gospel changes them. They begin to shun and abhor those things, which formerly they loved. Yes, the Gospel is a power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth. Those, who despise the Gospel, who do not accept it by faith, remain in their sins and vices; they keep on serving the devil, and whenever they must depart this temporal life, they despair and are eternally lost. But all those, who accept the Seed of the woman, the Savior Jesus Christ, as their Redeemer, become children of God. They love God, and they serve Him with a willing and cheerful heart. And whenever their last hour approaches, they do not despair, but they have well-founded hopes of eternal life. Like old Simeon, they gladly leave this world, saying with him: "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word; for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the

glory of Thy people Israel." Luke 2, 29-32. Yes, blessed, forever blessed, are they that hear and believe the soul-saving Gospel.

How is it with you, my beloved friend? Do you believe the Gospel with all your heart? Is the Gospel dearer to you than anything else? Is it the delight of your heart? The rod and staff in all your trials and crosses? Would you rather lose whatever you possess in material things than lose the Gospel? If you can truthfully say that you cherish the saving Gospel above all things, then, my beloved friend, you are indeed blessed. And in your dying-hour the Gospel will reveal its divine power in your believing heart. It will give you power to overcome the fear of death and condemnation, and it will make you sure of your soul's salvation, and you can then triumphantly say:—

For me to live is Jesus,
To die is gain for me,
To Him I gladly yield me,
And die right cheerfully.

From hence I go with gladness
To Christ my Brother's side
That I may soon be with Him,
And e'er with Him abide.

I have o'ercome life's crosses
Grief, pain, and sorrow cease,
Through His five wounds most holy
With God I am at peace.

Yes, indeed, the Gospel of Jesus Christ is a soul-saving power to every one that believeth! God grant true faith unto every one of us for the sake of His beloved Son, our one and only Savior and Redeemer, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Third Sunday in Advent.

Daniel 9, 24.

Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy.

When St. Paul, the greatest of all the apostles of Jesus Christ, stood before King Agrippa, defending himself against the base accusations of the Jews, said: "I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come," he referred to those things which had been prophesied by Moses and the prophets concerning the promised Messiah. All the prophecies concerning the Messiah were literally fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth, and, therefore, St. Paul believed Him to be the true Messiah, the one and only Savior of sinful men, and for this reason he so boldly and so cheerfully preached Christ to both the Jews and Gentiles. And for the very same reason have all true Christians at all times believed Jesus of Nazareth to be the true Messiah or that Seed of the woman, promised by God Himself after the Fall. If the prophecies concerning this Seed of the woman had not been literally fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth, neither St. Paul, nor any other Christians, could have accepted Jesus as the promised Savior, notwithstanding His numerous and great miracles which He performed. The true criterion for the divine Messiahship of Jesus Christ is the fact, that in Him, in Him alone, the prophecies of Moses and all the prophets concerning the promised Savior, were literally fulfilled. He is the Seed of the woman, who bruised the devil's head; He is the promised Savior of mankind.

The text before us for our present meditation foretold the *time* in which this Seed of the woman or Messiah should come, and what He should *accomplish*. This prophecy was also literally fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth. It is this fact to which I now wish to call your devout attention. By the assistance of the Holy Spirit, and in accordance with our text, let me speak to you of the—

Fulfilment of Daniel's Prophecy; as concerning,

1. *The time of the Savior's coming;* and
2. *The achievements of the dear Savior.*

1.

Daniel, one of the Jewish prophets, who had been led into the Babylonian captivity, delivered his prophecies at Babylon. Like all the prophets of God, he also prophesied by divine inspiration. In his prophecy before us for our present contemplation, he says thus: "*Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy.*"

Daniel speaks of seventy *weeks*. He says that after seventy weeks the Most Holy should be anointed in order to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sin, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and seal up the vision and prophecy. By the *Most Holy* he, no doubt, understands the promised Messiah, the Savior of the sinful world, the incarnate Son of God (Luke 1, 35).

When were the seventy weeks, spoken of by Daniel, to begin? He himself tells us in the verse following our text, for he says: "Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem unto Messiah, the Prince, shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks."

The seventy weeks begin with the time in which the commandment was given that the city of Jerusalem should be rebuilt. The Babylonian captivity of the Jews lasted from 606—536 B. C. In the year 536 Cyrus the Great permitted the Jews to go back to their native country and city. (See: 2 Chron. 36, 23; Ezra 1, 2.) Not all the captive Jews, however, returned to Judea and Jerusalem. As we learn from the second chapter of Ezra 42,360 persons, besides their servants, returned to Jerusalem under the leadership of Zerubbabel, a descendant of the legitimate royal race; and most of them settled on the site and in the vicinity of the city of Jerusalem. The other portion of the Jews remained in Babylon and Chaldea. Almost eighty years later this portion of the Jews left Chaldea and Babylon under the leadership of Ezra. (See: Ezra 10.) The great king of Persia, King Artaxerxes Longimanus, issued his decree to rebuild *Jerusalem* in the year

457 B. C. (See: Ezra, 7, 11—26.) It is *this* edict to which Daniel refers in his prophecy.*

As we know, Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah, through His bitter sufferings and ignominious death upon the cross made reconciliation for mankind's iniquities, and brought in an everlasting righteousness for all sinners, and sealed up the visions and prophecies (Hebrew 1, 2).

But, beloved friends, did not Daniel err after all, when he prophesied that all this should occur after *seventy weeks*? No; he did not err; he could not err because he spoke and wrote by divine inspiration.

In order to correctly understand the prophet, we must not overlook the fact that the Jews had not only an ordinary week of *seven days*, but also a so-called "shabua" (pronounce: shawboo-ah), a week of *seven years*.** If we turn to the twenty-fifth chapter of Leviticus, we read thus: "Six years thou shalt sow thy field, and six years thou shalt prune thy vineyard, and gather in the fruit thereof; but the seventh year shall be a Sabbath of rest unto the land, a Sabbath for the Lord; thou shalt neither sow thy field, nor prune thy vineyard. That which groweth of its own accord of thy harvest thou shalt not reap, neither gather the grapes of thy vine undressed; for it is a year of rest unto the land. And the Sabbath of the land shall be meat for you; for

* The claim of those who say that Daniel meant the decree issued by King Cyrus the Great in the year 536 B. C., and that therefore the prophecy of Daniel in our text could not have reference at all to Jesus Christ, is wrong; for if that were the case, then Daniel would have written something to that effect in the next chapter, which he wrote during the *third year* of the reign of King Cyrus the Great. This is evident to every candid mind. Moreover, King Cyrus the Great only issued a decree to the effect that the house of the Lord, that is, the *Temple*, should be built in the city of Jerusalem. It is evident, therefore, that the seventy weeks of Daniel's prophecy begin with the decree of King Artaxerxes Longimanus that *Jerusalem* should be rebuilt. This decree was issued in the year 457 B. C.

See also: *Lehre und Wehre*, Vol. 32, pp. 355—363.

** Prof. Dr. O. Zöckler says, in Lange's Bible Commentary, that these seventy weeks (siebenzig Jahrwochen), are not seventy ordinary weeks or 490 *days*, but 490 *years*, and that the Bible Critics are altogether wrong and unreasonable when they deny this to be a fact. He says that in ancient times it was nothing unusual to speak of "Jahrwochen."

thee, and for thy stranger that sojourneth with thee, and for thy cattle, and for the beast that are in the land, shall all thy increase thereof be meat. And thou shalt number seven Sabbaths of years unto thee, seven times seven years; and the space of the seven Sabbaths of years shall be unto the forty and nine years. Then shalt thou cause the trumpet of the jubilee to sound on the tenth day of the seventh month, in the Day of Atonement shall ye make the trumpet sound throughout all your land."

From this passage we can clearly see that the Jews generally divided time by the number seven: seven days, seven years, seven times seven years. They, therefore, had a week of seven days, just as we have, and a "shabua"; that is, a week of seven years (German: Jahrwoche).

The Prophet Daniel uses the word "shabua," which means seven years. So *seventy weeks* or *shabuas* are equal to seven times seventy years, which would be 490 years. The Prophet Daniel prophesied that from the time in which the decree should go forth to rebuild Jerusalem — not the Temple — to the accomplished work of Messiah, there should be 490 years.

Daniel prophesied that at the end of the *seventy weeks* or *shabuas* the Most Holy should finish the transgression, and make an end of sin, and make reconciliation for iniquity, and bring in everlasting righteousness, and seal up the vision and prophecy. The Most Holy is the Messiah, the Godman Savior of this sinful world. He is called the Most Holy, because He is the very Son of God, the Son of the Highest. And justly so; for who could be holier than He? Even the greatest saints among men are sinners, as we well know; they are by nature lost and condemned creatures. But Jesus Christ, the son of the Virgin Mary, is justly called the Most Holy, because He is the only man who has never committed a sin. He is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners (Hebr. 7, 26). Therefore the arch-angel Gabriel said to the Virgin Mary: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also that Holy Thing which shall be born of thee, shall be called the Son of God." Luke 1, 35.

The prophet says of the Most Holy that He shall be anointed, and for that reason he calls Him Messiah, for the word *Messiah* means, the Anointed. And why should the Most Holy be called the *Anointed*? Because He was to be our Prophet, Priest, and King. Under the old dispensation the prophets, priests, and kings

were anointed. They were anointed with olive-oil. But the Most Holy, the Messiah, was not anointed with olive-oil, but with the Oil of Gladness (Ps. 45, 7), for in Acts 10, 38 we read: "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power."

But also all the other things prophesied by the Prophet Daniel in our text, were literally fulfilled. And of this fact I shall now speak to you in the second place.

2.

Daniel says: "*Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy.*"

The prophet says that when the Most Holy, the Messiah, shall have accomplished His redeeming work, the *transgressions should be stayed*. And I ask you, Did not Jesus Christ accomplish this? Indeed, He did accomplish it. During the old dispensation the people of God were under the *ceremonial law*. They hardly could do anything without coming into conflict with the ceremonial law. Jesus, by His work of redemption, put away the ceremonial law, and thus He stayed the many transgressions of the same.

But even more. The Jews and all other people were also under the *moral law*. The Prophet Daniel prophesied that Messiah should also *make an end of sins*. This Jesus did. As soon as He had fulfilled the Law of God in the sinners' stead, and had suffered and died for sinful mankind, so soon an end was made with sin in the sight of God; for it is written: "God hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we may be made the righteousness of God in Him." 2 Cor. 5, 21; and again it is written: "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin." 1 John 1, 7.

Furthermore Daniel prophesied: "*And to make reconciliation for iniquity.*" I ask you, my friends, Who was it that made reconciliation for the sins of all mankind? Was it not Jesus Christ, our Savior and Redeemer? Why did He suffer and die on the cross on Calvary? Was it not, because He was the propitiation (reconciliation) for our sins and iniquities? Did He not suffer and die *willingly* for us and all sinful men, because He wanted to save us? Would it have been possible for men to crucify Jesus Christ, the very Son of God, the Omnipotent One, without His

consent? Surely not. Would it have been possible for sinful men to crucify Him at whose word all the men, who had come to capture Him in the garden of Gethsemane, fell down to the ground as impotent creatures? Would it have been possible for sinful men to crucify Him, who by a word of His mouth stilled the furious tempest on the Sea of Galilee? Would it have been possible for sinful men to crucify Him, who by a word of His mouth even raised up the dead, and at whose command devils fled in haste from demoniacs? Only a fool could make the assertion that Jesus suffered and died, because He could not do otherwise! All Christians know that Jesus Christ made reconciliation for the sins of the world by suffering and dying voluntarily, and they gladly confess with St. John: "He is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." 1 John 2, 2.

And by making reconciliation for our sins and iniquities by His sufferings and death, Jesus established an everlasting righteousness or He did, what the prophet said that He should do, when he prophesied that Messiah would *bring in everlasting righteousness*. Our own righteousnesses are as filthy rags (Is. 64, 6). With our own righteousness we cannot enter heaven, for it is altogether worthless in God's sight. How could any man, any sinful man, stand before God in his own righteousness, when he must admit that he in thoughts, words, and deeds sins against the righteous and holy God? Only the unspotted righteousness of Jesus Christ can avail in the sight of God, because His righteousness is *perfect*. When Jesus, therefore, hanging on the cross, dying for sinful men, cried out: "It is finished!" the righteousness, spoken of by the Prophet Daniel in our text, was established for all sinful men. God then and there declared all sinful men to be righteous in His sight. Every one, therefore, who believes this Gospel-truth can truthfully and triumphantly exclaim:—

Chief of sinners though I be,
Jesus shed His blood for me;
Died, that I might live on high,
Lived, that I might never die.

And again,

Yea, Jesus' blood and righteousness
My jewels are, my glorious dress.
Wherein before my God I stand
When I shall reach the heavenly land.

And, finally, the Prophet Daniel prophesied that Messiah should *seal up the vision and prophecy*. And again I ask you, my dear friends, Who was it that sealed up the vision and prophecy? You know that it was none other than Jesus. With His work of redemption accomplished, the vision and prophecy came to an end, for in the Epistle to the Hebrews we read: "God who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son." Hebr. 1, 1. 2.

Yes, indeed, the visions and prophecies are now forever sealed. If, therefore, some men or women arise and say that they had a divine vision, or that they had received new revelations, as, for example, the founder of Mormonism, — Joseph Smith; or the founder of so-called Christian Science, — Mrs. Mary Baker Patterson Glover Eddy; or the founder of Russellism, — Charles T. Russell; or other founders of other unchristian church denominations, then, beloved friends, we can be quite sure, yea, absolutely certain, that they are false, unchristian prophets, impostors. Visions and prophecies were sealed for all times to come after the Most Holy, the promised Messiah, had been anointed and His work of redemption accomplished. There is but *one* book of divine revelation, and this book is the *Bible*. This book we must diligently study and follow, then, my dear friends, we shall not go astray. That all of us may do this, God grant for the sake of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Fourth Sunday in Advent.

Haggai, 2, 6-9.

For thus saith the Lord of hosts: Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; and I will shake all nations, and the Desire of all nations shall come; and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts. The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine, saith the Lord of hosts. The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts; and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts.

The text which I have just read, is taken from the Book of Haggai. Haggai was one of the three post-exilic prophets of the Jews. He prophesied at Jerusalem about 520 B. C. He prophesied unto those Jews that had come back from the Babylonian captivity, after Cyrus the Great had given them permission to return to their own country and city. Yea, Cyrus the Great had enjoined them to build the house of the Lord of hosts in the city of Jerusalem. Solomon's temple had been destroyed by King Nebuchadnezzar in the year 588 B. C. But the Jews were more bent on building themselves beautiful houses than to build the house of the Lord. For this reason the Lord sent Haggai unto them, and through him enjoined the selfish Jews to go to work at once and erect His house. And in order to encourage them in doing His will cheerfully, He gave them the precious promise which we have in our text. Let us now consider it in the fear of the Lord. By the assistance of the Holy Spirit, and in accordance with our text, the theme of our present contemplation shall therefore be:—

The Precious Promise of the Lord, Given to His People by the Prophet Haggai.

Let me show,

1. *What the Lord promised them; and*
2. *How His promise was fulfilled.*

1.

What did the Lord promise unto the Jerusalemites? We have the answer to this question in our text, which says that He made this promise: "*It is a little while, and I will shake the heavens and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; and I will shake all nations, and the Desire of all nations shall come; and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts. The silver is*

Mine, and the gold is Mine, saith the Lord of hosts. The glory of this latter house shall be greater than the former, saith the Lord of hosts, and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts."

The most beautiful temple the Israelites ever had was the one built by King Solomon. Externally it surpassed any temple of antiquity. It was numbered among the Seven Wonders of the world. It had been built of cedar wood, and many parts of it were overlaid with gold. This wonderful temple King Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed.

When the first troop of the Jews under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Jeshua left Babylon for Judea and Jerusalem in the year 536 B. C., by permission of King Cyrus the Great, they went home with the earnest and sincere purpose to carry out the commandment of the noble king at once, viz., to build the house of the Lord. They laid the foundation for the Temple, but that was all they did. After the foundation had been laid, they stopped the work for various reasons. The chief reason was, that they wished to erect their own houses first. Then the Lord sent His prophets to them to chide and to encourage them to build His house. There were two prophets which the Lord sent to His people. These were Haggai and Zechariah. Haggai rebuked them very severely on account of their selfishness and tardiness in building the Temple, for he came unto them, saying: "Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built. . . . Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cedar houses, and this house lie waste? Now therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts: Consider your ways. Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes. Thus saith the Lord of hosts: Consider your ways. Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the Lord. Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little, and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it (or: I did blow it away). Why? saith the Lord of hosts. Because of Mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house. Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit. And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the

corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labor of the hands." Chap. 1, 2—11.

Yet, beloved friends, the Lord did not only severely chide His people, but He also gave them a precious promise, as we see from our text, for He said unto them, that the temple which they should build should be more glorious than the one King Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed. The Lord promised: "*I will fill this house with glory....The glory of this latter house shall be greater than the former.*"

After the chiding and encouragement of the Lord by the mouth of the Prophet Haggai the people went to work, and they built the house of the Lord under the directions of Zerubbabel, the prince, and Jeshua (Joshua), the high priest, and the prophets (Ezra 5, 2). This second temple of the Jews was also a very pretty one, but its external glory and splendor were not by any means as great as that of the first one, which King Solomon had built. The Lord Himself said unto the old people, who had seen the first temple: "Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do ye see it now? Is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?" Haggai 2, 3. The Lord meant to say that the external splendor of the *second* temple was nothing when compared with the splendor of the *first* one. And so it was; for Ezra tells us that the old people, who had seen the first temple, wept bitterly when they saw the foundations of the second one (Ezra 3, 12). And yet, the Lord says that the *glory of the second temple shall be greater than that of the first one.*

How are we to understand this promise of the Lord? That the Lord does not refer at all to the *external* glory of this latter house, is evident. When He says that the glory of this latter house shall surpass that of the first one, He refers to the blessed fact that the Savior of the world shall glorify this second temple by His visible presence, for that is what the Lord means, when He says: "*The Desire of all nations shall come.*" The "Desire of all nations" shall come, and shall grace this latter house with His presence, the Lord wishes to say. That is the reason why the glory of the second temple shall surpass that of the first one. This precious promise of the Lord was fulfilled in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, the true Messiah. Of this fact I shall now speak to you in the second place.

The Lord says in our text: *"It is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; and I will shake all nations, and the Desire of all nations shall come; and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts.The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts; and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts."*

This promise was fulfilled through Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus graced the second temple by His visible presence at divers times. The first time He was in it was on the day of His presentation, when old Simeon took Him up in his arms and glorified God, saying: "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word; for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel." Luke 2, 29—32. Again He graced this temple when He, being twelve years old, was in the midst of the learned doctors, asking them questions, and giving answers to their perplexing queries, and thus He manifested forth His divine personality. And after that He went down to Jerusalem frequently, and He always went into the Temple when He was in the city, preaching the Word, and performing great miracles, and thus He manifested forth His divine Sonship. Yes, Jesus of Nazareth is the "Desire of all nations," spoken of by the Lord in our text, for He, He alone, is the Savior of the sinful world.

The Jews are still longing and looking for the advent of the Messiah, the "Desire of all nations"; but it is in vain, for He has already come in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. The prophecy in our text should convince every Jew that Messiah has already come; for if He was to grace the temple which was built under Zerubbabel with His visible presence, and thus cause its glory to surpass that of Solomon's temple, as the Lord Himself foretold it in our text, He *must* have come long ago, for this temple has been destroyed many centuries ago by the Romans under Titus. Oh, the poor deluded Jews! Having rejected the true Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, they have rejected their one and only Savior; for there is salvation in none other than in Jesus (Acts 4, 12). Oh, that their eyes might be opened, so that they would do what old Simeon did: accept Jesus of Nazareth as the God of their salvation! And we Christians, beloved friends,

can be of good cheer and comfort, for in accepting Jesus of Nazareth as our dear Savior, we can be sure that we err not, for He is in deed and in truth the true Messiah, the "Desire of all nations."

What the fathers most desired,
What the prophets' heart inspired
What they longed for many a year,
Stands fulfilled in glory here.

Abram's promised great Reward,
Zion's Helper, Jacob's Lord,
Him of twofold race behold,
Truly came, as long foretold.

That we Christians err not, beloved friends, when we firmly believe Jesus Christ to be that promised "Desire of all nations," who should make the glory of Zerubbabel's temple greater than that of Solomon's, we can see when we look to the circumstances under which He should come.

The Lord said in our text that at the coming of Messiah or the "Desire of all nations," He would shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; and all the nations, for thus we read in our text: "For thus saith the Lord of hosts: Yet once, it is a little while, and *I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; and I will shake all nations, and the Desire of all nations shall come; and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts.*"

When, beloved friends, did the Lord shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land, and all the nations? Was it not at the time of the incarnation of His only-begotten Son,—at the time of the birth of Jesus Christ? Indeed; for what happened when Jesus had been born of the Virgin Mary in that lowly stable at Bethlehem? Were not the heavens shaken mightily? All the heavenly hosts became astir. One of the holy angels, perhaps Gabriel, came down from heaven to preach the glad tidings of the Savior's birth to a lot of poor shepherds on the fields around Bethlehem. He appeared unto them in heavenly brightness, and when they became affrighted, he said to them: "Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ (Messiah) the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you: Ye shall find the Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was

with the angel the multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." Luke 2, 10—14. Indeed, the heavens were shaken at the time of the birth of Jesus Christ. All the holy angels became astir with joy, and they left their heavenly abode, and they came down into this sinful world, into this "vale of tears," to bring joy to lost mankind. And to be sure, when they returned to heaven the songs of praise were continued, and even to this day they sing unto the Lamb that was slain for sinners, and that saved the sinful, lost world from sin, death, and the power of the devil (Rev. 5, 9).

And, most beloved friends, were not the earth, and the sea, and the dry land, and all the nations shaken at the time of the birth of Jesus Christ? Surely, they were; for the great and mighty Emperor Augustus had issued a decree to all the people living in his vast empire that they all, every one of them, should be taxed in his own city, that is, in the city of his birth. The Roman empire at that time was at the height of its power and glory. All the then known world was subject to Caesar Augustus, and every one went to be taxed in accordance with his decree. Millions upon millions of people became astir. All the highways in all the lands were literally filled with people, for all had to go to the city of their birth in order to be taxed. The seas were covered with ships and boats, being filled with people going to their native cities to be taxed. Yea, all nations, not only the Jewish nation, but also all the Gentile nations, went to be taxed. Never before, nor afterwards, was there a time in which *all* nations were shaken as then, that is, never before, nor afterwards, was there such a general home-coming as then.

St. Luke tells us, that Joseph and Mary went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because they were of the house and lineage of David, in order to be taxed. And while they were at Bethlehem, Mary gave birth to Jesus, and she wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger, because they had not been able to get into an inn. Yes, Jesus Christ is the "Desire of all nations," spoken of in our text by the Lord. In Him this precious promise was literally fulfilled. He is the Prince of Peace, of whose coming the great Prophet Isaiah had prophesied. He brought real, abiding peace of conscience to poor sinners that accept Him as their Savior. All these have found real peace in

Him, peace, which the world cannot give. Yea, indeed, He is the true Messiah, the one and only Savior of all mankind.

Do you, my beloved friend, believe in Jesus Christ? Do you put all your hope and trust in Him for your eternal salvation? Well for you, if you do, for then you shall be saved; for it is written: "God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

God being willing, we shall celebrate Christmas a few days hence. If we truly believe in Jesus Christ as in our one and only Savior, then, beloved friends, we shall celebrate Christmas, the festival of our Savior's nativity, with joyful and grateful hearts, because God sent His Son to us to be our Redeemer from sin, death, and damnation. If Jesus be in our hearts, a blessed Christmas will be our lot. Let us therefore daily pray with a Christian poet, and say with all our heart:—

Redeemer, come! I open wide
My heart to Thee; here, Lord, abide!
Let me Thy inner presence feel,
Thy grace and love in me reveal;
Thy Holy Spirit guide us on,
Until our glorious goal be won!
Eternal praise and fame
We offer to Thy name.

So help us God, for the sake of His only-begotten Son Jesus Christ, our blessed Redeemer! Amen.

Christmas Eve.

John 3, 16.

God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Today we are again celebrating Christmas. Christmas is the most joyful festival of Christendom. All true Christians in this world are today commemorating the incarnation of the Son of God. The message of the angel of the Lord, first heard by lowly shepherds on the plains of Judea near the little town of Bethlehem, is today proclaimed from all truly Christian pulpits in over seven hundred different languages and dialects. To poor sinners there is no message so joyful as that angelic Christmas-message: "Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord." Luke, 2, 10. 11.

Indeed, my beloved friends, if sinners were not permitted to listen to this saving message, it should be far better for them, if they never had been born, for without the "Savior, which is Christ the Lord," there would be no salvation for them. Without the dear Savior, whose incarnation we so joyfully celebrate this day, even an earthly paradise would be nothing less for us than the very gate of hell, for without the Christ-child none of us, nor any sinful being, could ever hope to be eternally saved. This is what the message of the angel implied. If our heavenly Father had not sent His only-begotten Son into this world, all men would have been eternally lost. That this is true, we can see from our text. For what does it say? Listen! It brings us the glad tidings: "God so loved the world, that he gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." These words of our text are, indeed, the most precious words in the whole Bible. They reveal unto us a love that is incomprehensible. By the assistance of the Holy Spirit, and in accordance with our text, let me now speak to you of this fact, —

That the Incarnation of Jesus Christ is the Climax of the Manifestation of Divine Love.

Our text says: *“God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”*

From these words it is evident that it is true when St. John cried out, “God is love!” Yea, God is love. All His acts manifest forth His great love. The whole creation tells us of God’s great love. If we will only open our eyes and see, we can see nothing but manifestations of God’s love. God did not only make every creature, but every creature He made, was very good. Chief among all visible creatures was *man*, because God Himself prepared his body, and gave him a rational soul, and, above all, made him in His own image, that is, without the least spiritual defect, for man was morally perfect when he came forth out of the creative hand of God. God also prepared a special place of abode for sinless man, a most beautiful garden, called the Garden of Eden or Paradise. Man had everything he could possibly wish for. And, O how blessed he was! God spake to him face to face, like a loving father with his son and daughter. But in order to prove him, God forbade him to eat of the fruit of the tree, which was called the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, saying: “Thou shalt not eat of it; for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” Gen. 2, 17. But what did man do? He transgressed God’s commandment; he sinned. By sinning man became an enemy of the just and righteous God.

What did God then do? He drove man out of the Garden of Eden, but gave him the gracious promise, that He would send a Savior unto fallen mankind, who should save all men from sin, death, and damnation. And this Savior came — years ago to-day, for — years ago the incarnation of God’s only-begotten Son took place, when He was born of the Virgin Mary in a stable at Bethlehem; for the angel of the Lord said unto those lowly shepherds on the plains of Bethlehem: “Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.” God the Father had kept His promise which He had made to Adam and Eve after the Fall. The Eternal Word, that is, the Son of God, had become flesh, a true man; His incarnation had occurred.

When God the Father sent His only-begotten Son into this world as a Christmas gift, He revealed a love which is past find-

ing out. A love, which cannot be comprehended by man, nor by angels. The just and righteous God loved the sinful world, and He loved it so intensely, that He gave the very best He had, viz., His only-begotten Son; gave Him as a Savior for lost and condemned mankind; gave Him so that He might suffer and die for all men in order to redeem them to God (Rev. 5, 9). Indeed, in the incarnation of the Son of God the climax of the manifestation of divine love was manifested. There is not and there cannot be, a greater love than the love of God toward a lost and condemned sinner-world, which manifested forth itself in the incarnation of God's only-begotten Son.

2.

"God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

From these words of our text we see that the object of God's love was sinful and lost mankind. God sent His only-begotten Son into the world that He might save that which was lost. And we know from the Bible that Jesus saved all sinful men by His sufferings and death. When He cried out from the accursed tree of the cross: "It is finished!" the redemption of sinful mankind was accomplished. All those, who accept Jesus as their one and only Savior, that is, who truly believe in Him with all their heart, and, therefore, love and serve Him, are true Christians, and they shall not perish, but be eternally saved; for our text says, that "whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

God gave His only-begotten Son to the world, to sinful mankind, and His Son willingly fulfilled the Law in our stead, and suffered and died in order to save us. There can be no greater love than this divine love. And when God the Father sent His Son to save mankind, the climax of the manifestation of divine love was manifested.

This Gospel-message is again preached today from all truly Christian pulpits, and it fills the hearts of all true Christians with great joy. When the holy angel of the Lord, who appeared unto those lowly shepherds on the quiet plains of Judea near Bethlehem, said to them: "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people," he proclaimed unto them the glorious Gospel-message, and as they believed that Gospel-

message, joy, great joy, divine joy, entered into their hearts, and they were most blessed. So it is to this very day. All those poor sinful beings that believe the Gospel-message are filled with joy, divine joy, and they jubilantly sing, what you, beloved children, have sung this eve:—

I love to tell the story
Which angels' voices tell,
How once the King of Glory
Came down on earth to dwell.
I am both weak and sinful,
But this I surely know,
The Lord came down to save me,
Because He loves me so.
I love to tell the story,
'Twill be my theme in glory,
To tell the old, old story
Of Jesus and His love.

To sing His love and mercy
My sweetest songs I'll raise;
And though I cannot see Him,
I know He hears my praise;
For He has kindly promised
That even I may go
To sing among His angels,
Because He loves me so.
I love to tell the story,
'Twill be my theme in glory,
To tell the old, old story
Of Jesus and His love.

Amen.

Christmas Day.

Isaiah 9, 6.

Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder. And His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.

Today we can truthfully and joyfully exclaim with the Psalmist of old: "This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it!" Indeed, we have all reasons in the world to be glad today, for it is the most joyous day of the whole year. Today is *Christmas Day*. This day brings joy and happiness to all Christians in this world; yea, even unbelievers and infidels rejoice this day.

Of course, unbelievers and infidels rejoice today for other reasons than we Christians do. They are glad today, because this day brings them many presents from their friends and relatives. They rejoice over material gifts which they receive. But all material gifts are perishable. All material gifts pass away in due time, and, therefore, the joy and happiness of unbelievers and infidels pass away with them.

It is not thus with true Christians, my beloved friends. It is true, they also rejoice over manifold material gifts which they have received from beloved ones, but their real joy rests upon something altogether different. The true Christian's Christmas joy never ceases, nor does his happiness ever wane, because he rejoices over a heavenly gift, a gift which God Himself has made unto him. What is this precious gift? This question is answered by the Prophet Isaiah in our text. This gift of God is a little child, a son of a virgin. This gift lies in a manger or crib in a stable at Bethlehem in Judea. St. Paul calls it the unspeakable gift of God (1 Cor. 9, 15). Let us, then, beloved friends and fellow-Christians, now direct our devout attention to this unspeakable gift of God. By the assistance of the Holy Spirit, and in accordance with our text, I shall now speak to you of:—

The Babe of Bethlehem.

Let me show you,

1. *That He is true man,* and
2. *That He is true God.*

1.

Isaiah, the great prophet of the Lord, cries out in our text: "*Unto us a Child is born!*" He speaks in the present tense, as though he himself had been present at the birth of the little Babe in the stable at Bethlehem. But, as we all know, Isaiah was not present at the birth of the Christ-child, for he lived almost eight hundred years before this Babe was born. Nevertheless, he speaks as though he had been an eye-witness to His birth. How can we explain this? We can explain it in this way: Isaiah spoke by divine inspiration. He had a vision. His prophetic eyes gazed into the distant future, and he beheld what took place in a stable at Bethlehem almost eight hundred years afterwards. He saw the birth of a virgin's child, and he cried out in exultation: "*Unto us a Child is born!*" Yes, a real human child he saw in his prophetic vision.

And he was not deceived, as we know from the New Testament writings. It was a little child, indeed, lying in a manger or crib, for when the angel of the Lord announced the birth of this Babe unto the lowly shepherds, who were watching their flocks in the vicinity of Bethlehem, he said unto them: "And this shall be a sign unto you: Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger." And when the shepherds had heard this message, and after the Christmas carol of the heavenly hosts was sung, they said one to another: "Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger." Indeed, the little Babe in the manger was a real human being. He looked like other little children, ~~only much prettier~~. He was dressed in swaddling clothes, and He nestled at His mother's breast, just like any other little child. And when the shepherds came home they told their own and their neighbor's children what they had seen in the stable at Bethlehem, and what they had heard.

Yes, the Babe in the manger was a real human being; a true man. When He was presented unto the Lord in the Temple, and when Mary and Joseph offered for Him the sacrifice, according to the Law, an old man, being just and devout, by the name of Simeon, took the little Jesus in his arms, looked into His sweet face, and, perhaps, kissed Him. When he looked at the Babe, he

beheld a real human child. Yes, the Babe of Bethlehem, Jesus Christ, is a true man.

When this Babe had grown up to be a boy, He went down with His parents to Jerusalem in order to celebrate the Passover. He was a true man, a real human being, for we find Him in the Temple in the midst of the learned doctors of divinity, asking them questions and giving answers to their questions. And we see Him go home to Nazareth with Mary and Joseph. And as St. Luke says of Him, He increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man. Indeed, a real human being we behold.

And when He began the ministration of His office, and for three and one half years preached the Gospel and performed many miracles throughout all Judea, Samaria, and Galilee, and the surrounding country, we see Him as He speaks and weeps, eats and drinks, walks and sleeps, just like any other human being. Yes, indeed, Jesus is a true man.

Indeed, beloved friends, Jesus Christ, whose birthday we to-day are celebrating, is a true man. Behold Him in His awful sufferings and His death upon the cross! He suffered and died; He suffered and died like a true man, a real human being.

But, beloved fellow-Christians, the Babe in the manger, Jesus Christ, is not only a true man, but also true God, the very Son of the Highest. That this is true, we also see from our text. Of His deity I shall speak to you in the second place.

2.

The Prophet Isaiah does not only cry out in the exultation: "Unto us a Child is born"; but he also jubilantly cries out: "*Unto us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder. And His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.*"

Isaiah knew that the little Babe in the manger was not to be only a true man, but also the very Son of God. This he knew by divine inspiration. It was the Holy Spirit who inspired the prophet with the names of that little Babe in the manger. He ascribes unto this Babe *divine* names, because He is also true God.

In the first place the prophet says, that His name shall be called *Wonderful*. Indeed, a name well becoming to the Babe in the manger, for He is the most wonderful being of all times: He

is true man, and at the same time, true God. That is surely most wonderful! As a child He was *born*, but as a son He was *given*. "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him, should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3, 16. The Godman Savior of the world is, indeed, the Wonder of all wonders. You may go out and look at the visible creation. You see the sun, the moon, and the stars. Is it not wonderful that each travels in its own track, without coming into collision with the other? Is it not wonderful that each is always on time? You may go out and see the wonderful mountains with their high peaks. Is it not a wonderful sight to behold? At their base you will see beautiful green grasses and trees, and on their summit you see nothing but ice and snow. Is that not wonderful? You may travel over the great oceans, and you behold wonderful waves as they chase each other, and as they become mountains of foaming waters whenever they are driven by infuriated winds. Is that not wonderful to behold? You may dig down into the body of the earth, and you will find all kinds of wonderful things: coal, copper, silver, gold, diamonds, and many other things. Is that not all very wonderful? You may look at your fellows, and you will see beings with an immortal soul; see how they govern the material and temporal things by their rational mind. Is that not most wonderful? Indeed, wonderful everything! And, beholding the wonderful works of the Lord, you and I, my beloved fellow-Christian, must exclaim with the great Psalmist David: "I will praise Thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvellous are Thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well!" Ps. 139, 14.

But all the wonderful works of God are nothing when compared with the Babe in the manger, for this Babe is God and man in one person. That is the greatest of all wonders. This wonder not even the holy angels can comprehend. This is a wonder which shall always be and remain a great mystery; a mystery that can never be solved by any angels, nor by any saints in heaven. The Babe of Bethlehem will always be and remain the Wonder of all wonders throughout eternity. Yea, His name shall be called Wonderful, and justly so, for He is the Wonder of all wonders.

The Prophet Isaiah says, furthermore, that His name shall also be called *Counselor*. That is another divine name. Counselor in the real sense of that word is God, and none other. And this Babe in the manger is the Counselor.

When God created the heavens and the earth, we are told in the Book of Genesis, He counseled with His only-begotten Son. The holy Apostle John assures us: "In the beginning was the Word (Logos), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made." John 1, 1—3. Yea, Jesus Christ, the Logos, is indeed the Counselor. He counsels us by His holy Word in all our needs of body and soul. We can go to Him for counsel, and we shall never be deceived. All questions concerning our future state, He has already answered in His Word. Ask Him, "What must I do to be saved?" and He will give you the correct answer; He will tell you: "He that believeth on Me hath everlasting life." You say, "Yes, Lord, but what will become of me after temporal death? What will become of my body?" He will answer: "This is the will of Him that sent Me, that everyone which seeth the Son, and believeth on Him, may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day." John 6, 40. If you ask him then: "What shall become of me after the resurrection?" He will tell you: "When the Son of Man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory; and before Him shall be gathered all nations; and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats; and He shall set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand, Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world....Then shall He say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels....And these shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal." Matt. 24, 31—34; 41, 46.

The Prophet Isaiah, furthermore, says of the Babe of Bethlehem, that He shall also be called the *Mighty God*. That is what Jesus is. He is lying in a crib, wrapped in swaddling clothes, and to the natural eye of man He seems to be a helpless little child, but, beloved friends, He is at the same time the almighty God. Do you doubt this to be a fact? Listen to what the angel from heaven says to the lowly shepherds. He tells them: "Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the *Lord*." Indeed, Jesus Christ is the

almighty Son of God. Can you doubt this, my beloved friends? You cannot doubt it in the least, if you know the Holy Scriptures at all. Read what the evangelists and apostles say of Him, and you cannot do otherwise than cry out with doubting Thomas: "My Lord and my God!" Do you see that little boat on the troubled Sea of Galilee with the apostles of the Lord in it, and He Himself asleep? Do you see how that little ship is covered with waves, and about to dash into the deep? Look and see! Jesus arises from His sleep, and He speaks a word, and there is a great calm. Come, go with me to Capernaum. I will lead you to a house of mourning, for the only daughter of Jairus is dead. See Jairus and his wife weeping! Jesus steps up to the dead girl, and He speaks but two little words, "Talitha cumi," and what happens? The girl arises from the sleep of death. Will you perhaps say that the girl had not really died at all? Come, let me take you to Bethany, a small village near Jerusalem. Look into that sepulcher! Do you see Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha? Is he really dead? Surely, he must be, for he has lain there already for four days. Don't you smell that awful stench as it comes forth from the sepulcher? Don't you hear Martha's cry, "Lord, he stinketh!"? And, behold, Jesus steps up to the sepulcher, and He opens His mouth and speaks but three words, for He says to dead Lazarus: "Lazarus, come forth!" Does Lazarus hear and understand Jesus? Most assuredly he does, for he comes forth, as Jesus had enjoined him to do. Yea, indeed, Jesus Christ is the almighty God. I could easily multiply examples to show that Jesus is the almighty God, but these may suffice.

Furthermore, the Prophet Isaiah says of the Babe of Bethlehem that His name shall be called the *Everlasting Father*. And thus it is. The little Babe in the manger is the everlasting Father, that is, He is the Eternal One, for He is true God. When some of the unbelieving Jews said unto Him: "Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast Thou seen Abraham?" Jesus said unto them: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am." Yes, He is the eternal Son of God, and, therefore, He justly deserves the name Everlasting Father.

Finally, my beloved friends, the Prophet Isaiah says of the Babe of Bethlehem that His name shall be called the *Prince of Peace*. All real peace, abiding peace, comes from Him. He is the giver of the peace of the heart, of the soul. Without Him no

sinner has ever found peace for his troubled conscience. You, my dear friend, may enjoy perfect civil peace in your beloved fatherland, and, indeed, civil peace is a precious thing; but when your sins and transgressions trouble you, when you are terrified on account of your sins and transgressions, and when you fear the wrath and punishment of a just and holy God, then, believe me, there is only *one* peace that can avail, and that peace is the peace of the soul. This peace no man can give unto you. Jesus alone is able to give this precious peace. And He gives it through His Gospel. He tells you: "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Matt. 11, 28. Through His Gospel He will assure you of His compassion and love, and this assurance will give you real peace. This peace brings joy and happiness into the heart of a poor sinner, so that he cannot despair in his trials and temptations, in his crosses and bereavements. This peace of the soul will give you true courage to meet grim death, when he knocks at your door. This peace is a real peace, a peace that passeth all understanding. Yes, Jesus Christ is the Prince of Peace. He established real peace between His Father in heaven and a sinful world. When He was born in a stable at Bethlehem, the heavenly hosts came down upon this earth, and they proclaimed peace, saying: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men." Yes, indeed, beloved friends, the Babe of Bethlehem is the giver of a blessed, abiding, precious peace of the soul!

Precious Babe of Bethlehem!
 Gift of love to sinful men,
 Thou, our Savior, Lord and King, —
 May we all Thy praises sing!

Amen.

Sunday after Christmas.

Acts 16, 30—34.

Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. And they spake unto him the Word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his straightway. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.

During the blessed season of Advent we directed our devout attention to some of the prophecies concerning the promised Messiah or Savior of the sinful world. During the joyous Christmas festivities we heard that the prophecies concerning the promised Messiah were fulfilled in the birth of the little Babe of Bethlehem, for He is the Messiah of whose coming the prophets had spoken by divine inspiration centuries before. That He is indeed that Messiah or Savior, we cannot doubt in the least, since the angel-preacher from heaven announced His coming to some lowly shepherds, who were watching their flocks on the fields around Bethlehem, with these words: "Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people, For unto you is born this day in the city of David (Bethlehem) a Savior, which is Christ (Messiah) the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you, Ye shall find the Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger." And what the angel-preacher had announced, was substantiated as truth by all the heavenly hosts, who appeared, and sang that beautiful Christmas carol: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men."

Jesus Christ, whose incarnation we just have celebrated so joyously and gratefully, is the founder of the true Christian religion. Without Him there could not be true Christianity. Without Him, and without true Christianity the world would still be what it was before He came. True Christianity changed barbarism into benign Christian civilization. It changed human thought and life for the betterment of mankind. Without true Christianity this world would still be what it was before the birth of Christ Jesus and the establishment of the Christian Church.

True Christianity always was, now is, and ever will be a God-sent blessing to humanity. The purer Christianity is, the

greater is its blessing. Perverted Christianity is of little or no worth. As true Christianity advances in this sinful world, so the temporal and eternal weal of mankind advances. Perverted Christianity stays the benign blessings which God is willing to bestow upon humankind; yea, it leads back to paganism with all its inhumanity and brutality. True Christianity is the only channel through which poor sinners can reach eternal happiness and escape everlasting woes, because it leads to, and embraces, the one and only Savior of sinful men. This being true, my beloved friends, let me now call your attention to:—

True Christianity.

Let me show,

1. *What true Christianity is, and*
2. *How true Christianity manifests itself.*

1.

What is true Christianity? This question is surely a very important one, for so long as a man does not know what true Christianity really is, so long he cannot know how he may be eternally saved.

The question, *What is true Christianity?* is essentially the same as the question we have in our text, the question of the Philippian jailor: "*Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*" This most important question was originally addressed to St. Paul and Silas.

When St. Paul was at Troas, a city in the extreme western part of Asia Minor, he had a vision. There stood a man of Macedonia, and entreated him, saying: "Come over into Macedonia, and help us!" The apostle immediately embarked for the European shores. He took with him his three assistant preachers: Silas, Timothy, and Luke. When they had come to Philippi, the chief city of Macedonia, they went to the riverside, where they found a few women. St. Paul at once preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ to them, and one of them, Lydia by name, a seller of purple of the city of Thyatira, respectfully listened to Paul's Gospel-sermon. She became converted, and she invited the four missionaries to her home. Here St. Paul again preached the Gospel, and Lydia's whole household, that is, her husband, children and servants were converted and baptized. Thus the first Christian congregation had been founded in Europe.

It is always contrary to the wish of Satan that any people join the Church of Jesus Christ, and, therefore, he aroused ill feel-

ings against the Christian missionaries in Philippi. How did he do it? There was a damsel "possessed with a spirit of divination," that is, possessed with a devil. This poor girl could not free herself from the power of Satan. Wicked men used her to fill their coffers with the money of the ignorant and superstitious people of the city. In order to make the people believe that St. Paul and his coworkers were in harmony with such spirits as the damsel was possessed of, Satan through her cried out, saying of the Christian preachers: "These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation!" This happened for many days, the holy Apostle Paul keeping his peace. But one day he turned about, commanding the evil spirit in the damsel: "I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour." But what happened then? The masters of the soothsaying girl got very angry at St. Paul and his associates, because the hope of their gains was gone, and they laid hands on Paul and Silas, and brought them before the magistrates of the city. At the same time they prejudiced the people against them, and Paul and Silas were scourged and cast into the prison. The jailor did not only put them into the inner prison, but he also made their feet fast in the stocks, so that they should not escape by any means. But, "Man proposes, and God disposes." In the middle of the night St. Paul and Silas prayed and sang doxologies unto God. All their fellow-prisoners heard them. "And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed." When the jailor found out what had happened, he drew his own sword and was about to kill himself. He knew that, if the prisoners would escape, he would be beheaded. But St. Paul cried out to him: "Do thyself no harm; for we are all here!" Then the jailor came to St. Paul and Silas, and fell down before them and asked them: "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

The jailor was a heathen man. From what is said of him we see that he had almost suffered death at his own hands. He knew not the true God, nor His Son Jesus Christ, the Savior of sinners. "These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation!" — Thus the damsel had cried out. But the jailor never thought of asking them to show him the way of salvation. He had lived the life of a heathen man. He had lived in many sins, but until this night his conscience had not

troubled him very much, because it had been asleep. But during this awful night it was awakened, and it tormented him greatly. He asked himself, What shall become of me? Can there be salvation for a sinner such as I am? He would like to be saved, but he knew not how that could be possible. In his agony and remorse over his sins, he falls down upon his face before these "servants of the most high God," whom he does not know, but, perhaps, they can show unto him a way of escape from eternal perdition. He cries out: "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" He wishes to say, Can I receive pardon from God, whom you preach? Will God accept a sinner such as I am?

What did they say to the terrified jailor? Listen! They said unto him: "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.*" While the jailor lay trembling at their feet, listening to their words, his wife, children, and servants came to inquire what all this meant. They also had been awakened by the midnight doxologies of St. Paul and Silas, and when the earth began to quake, their hearts also quaked with the earth; they became terrified. They knew as little of the Lord Jesus as the jailor himself, and they also had immortal souls that must be saved. Therefore St. Paul and Silas told them what they already had said to the jailor; for St. Luke tells us in our text: "And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house." Paul and Silas preached the saving Gospel to these terrified sinners. They told them of the true God, who so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. They told them of the bitter sufferings and death of the Lord Jesus, and how He had reconciled all men to God through His atonement. They told them of the life eternal that is in store for all those who accept Jesus Christ by true faith. And God opened the hearts of these people and they believed in the Savior of sinners. Thus they had become truly converted—changed. These people who until then had been unbelieving and ungodly heathens, now had become disciples of Jesus Christ, — true Christians.

What, then, is true Christianity? It is nothing more, nor less, than true repentance of one's sins, and true faith in the Savior Jesus Christ. That is true Christianity.

But how can we know whether this jailor and all of his were really true believers in Jesus Christ? I answer, Their faith or

Christianity manifested itself. How did it manifest itself? This question I shall now answer in the second place.

2.

We read in our text: "*And he took them (Paul and Silas) the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.*"

The believing jailor and his believing family were *baptized* at once. As soon as they had found the only true Savior, they also desired to make use of His holy Sacrament of Baptism. Baptism, according to God's Word, is a washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost (Titus 3, 5). As soon as a man is converted through the Gospel, so soon he will also be baptized, if he has not yet received this holy Sacrament in his infancy. When the day of Pentecost had come after Jesus Christ's sufferings, death, resurrection, and ascension, and the holy apostles preached Christ and Him crucified, three thousand people repented of their sins, and accepted Jesus as their one and only Savior, and they were immediately baptized by the holy apostles. When Saul of Tarsus, the relentless persecutor of the young Christian Church, was converted on his way to Damascus, he received the Sacrament of Baptism, and became the greatest apostle of the Lord. When Lydia and her household (family) had accepted Jesus by true faith, they were baptized. So also the Philippian jailor and all of his. They were baptized "straightway" St. Luke tells us. They did not even wait until the next day.

So it ever must be. In our days many people profess faith in the Lord Jesus, but they have no regard for the holy Sacrament of Baptism, nor any longing to be baptized in the name of the true God. Such people may profess faith in the Lord Jesus, but they surely have no true faith in Him. If they really believed in Him, they would do what this jailor and all of his did: they would be baptized. No one can be or remain a true believer if he contemns baptism, for the contempt of the Sacrament of Baptism condemns.

The true Christianity of the Philippian jailor was also manifested by his *mercy and hospitality*. Before his conversion he had been merciless and unhospitable to his needy and maltreated fellows as we can see from his behavior towards Paul and

Silas. When they were unjustly scourged and cast into prison without cause, he did not protest, but he rather sided with the rabble; yea, he even cast them into the inner prison, and fastened their feet in stocks. All this was uncalled for. These very actions of the jailor show that he also hated these Christian missionaries, and that he rejoiced in their sufferings. But as soon as he became a true believer in the Lord Jesus, his heart was changed, and he became merciful and hospitable towards them. He himself washed the stripes of Paul and Silas and took them into his home, and served them as well as he could; he gave them meat and drink.

Thus it is to this day. As soon as people believe in the Lord Jesus with all their heart, so soon they will become merciful and hospitable. It cannot be otherwise. People that call themselves Christians, but do not show mercy and hospitality to the needy and suffering, are not Christians at all. They have not the true faith. They have a perverted, a dead faith, which cannot save, for faith without works is dead (James 2, 20). This we must not overlook, my friends.

The true Christianity of the jailor was finally manifested by his *rejoicing, believing in God with all his house*. He had often rejoiced in the sinful things and pleasures of the wicked world, but now, being a true Christian, he found no joy in worldly, sinful frolics. Now he rejoiced, believing in God with all his house (family). He had become a true Christian, a new creature, and therefore other things caused him to rejoice. He was so glad, because he and all of his had now found the true God, their Lord and Savior, who had redeemed and saved them from sin, death, and the power of the devil. He now knew of no greater joy than to be God's child, — a true Christian.

True Christianity is manifested to this very day by a joyful gratitude towards God and His dear Son Jesus Christ. As soon as a man becomes a true Christian, he ceases to care for the sinful and giddy pleasures of the worldlings. He has no longer any longing to enjoy himself with the children of the wicked and pleasure-mad world. He shuns all worldly, sinful amusements as dances, balls, theaters, lewd picture-shows, drinking bouts, and many other sinful pleasures.

But, perhaps, some one will say, "I believe in Jesus Christ, but I cannot say that I have an aversion to the worldly pleasures." My dear friend, if such is the case with you, then, alas! you do

not truly believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; you are not a true Christian, even though you outwardly are a member of some Christian congregation. Your heart is not with Jesus, but with the world. If you really believed in Jesus Christ, my friend, you would dislike all sinful amusements and pleasures. Our dear Savior Himself has said that no man can serve two masters at the same time. And you know, He tells the truth, for He cannot lie. Half-hearted service of the Lord is a perverted Christianity; yes, it is downright hypocrisy. Sound Christianity manifests itself by whole-hearted service to the Lord. And this whole-hearted service is not rendered with any selfish thoughts, but it is prompted by Christian gratitude. True Christianity does not ask, "Lord, what wilt Thou give me for my service?" No; it rather will ask, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits towards me?" Ps. 116, 12.

"With the Bible in its hand," true Christianity "stands by the cross, and looks up into the face of God with all the loving confidence of an accepted child. The voice of prayer, thanksgiving, and adoration is on its lips; but it does not rest in mere laudations. It is honest, industrious, benevolent, and good; though it does not imagine that its works can justify before God; nor its moralities and charities exempt from worship and faith in Jesus....It does not take saying of prayer for piety; nor morality for religion; nor theology for faith; nor counting beads, penances, fasts, or monkery for righteousness; nor a sudden spring of an excited brain for forgiveness of sins. It sees everything in Christ. It sees God in Christ. It sees its righteousness in Christ, its justification in Christ, its exemplar in Christ, its hope in Christ. It sees the penalty of sin in the sacrifice of Christ; and realizes forgiveness in the promise of Christ; and finds its duty in the commands of Christ; and relies for help upon the grace of Christ." (Dr. Joseph Seiss.) Indeed, beloved friends, beautiful is true Christianity! May God grant and preserve unto everyone of us — true Christianity. Amen.

New Year's Eve.

Genesis 41, 9.

Then spake the chief butler unto Pharaoh, saying, I do remember my faults this day.

The end of another year has come. In a few hours, by God's grace, we shall begin a new year. Years come and go, and thus it will be until there will be no more years,—to the end of time. A clock may stop, but time does not stop with it. There is but one instance, as far as we know, that time was stayed. That was the time when Joshua said in the name of the almighty God: "Sun stand still upon Gibeon; and thou, moon, in the valley of Ajalon." Josh. 10, 12.

Time goes on, and we go on with it to the end of time or to the end of our lives. At the end of our lives eternity begins for us. Therefore St. Paul so solemnly admonishes all Christians to redeem the time, when he writes: "See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is." Eph. 5, 15—17. And King David cried out: "Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am." Ps. 39, 4.

The end of a year reminds us of the end of our temporal life. If we think of the end of our life, we, of course, if we be wise, also think of our lot in the hereafter. Only fools have no delight in understanding and wisdom. (Proverbs 18, 2.)

It is said, that many years ago, a certain lord kept a jester to whom he presented a fine staff, and advising him at the same time to carry it until he would meet with a fool greater than himself. Should he happen to find such a one, he should give the staff to him. Several years later the lord became seriously ill. Apprising his jester, who had come to him, of his critical condition, and telling him he soon must leave this world and life, the jester began to weep and asked his lord, "Whither are you going, my dear lord?" "To the other world," the dying lord replied. "When will you return?" asked the jester. "Will you not come again within a month?" "No," was the lord's response. "When then? After the lapse of a year?" "Ah, no!" "Well, then, perhaps after many years?" "Ah, no; never, never, never!" "What arrangements and provisions have you made, my dear lord, that

you may remain there for so long a while?" "None at all," the lord replied. "None at all?" retorted the jester. "You are going to leave for another world, whence you shall never return, and yet you did not think of making any preparations? Why, then, lord, take back the staff; for so foolish as that I have never been!"

That lord certainly was a greater fool than his jester, for he did not use the time allotted to him in his present life, as he should have done.

How is it with us, my beloved friends? Are we using the time allotted to us by the good and gracious God in such a way that our eternal blessedness is made secure? We are, if we use it as truly penitent Christians do. How, then, do they use it? They use it as the chief butler of Pharaoh did. What, then, did he do? He remembered his faults, his sins, and confessed them. That is what we also must do now, if we would end this old year in a God-pleasing manner. Why?

Why Must We Remember Our Sins This Eve, If We Would End This Old Year in a God-pleasing Manner?

I answer,

1. *Because we cannot end it as truly penitent sinners, if we do not remember our sins, and*
2. *Because we cannot receive God's forgiveness, if we do not truly repent of our sins.*

1.

The words of our text are familiar to everyone who is somewhat acquainted with the story of Joseph's life. Joseph, being a pious and obedient son, was the favorite child of Jacob. His brothers envied and hated him, and finally they sold him to some Midianites, who were on their way to Egypt. Joseph was sold for twenty pieces of silver.* The Midianites sold him to an officer of the Egyptian king, whose name was Potiphar. Potiphar had a lewd wife. When the God-fearing Joseph would not do her will, she accused him of wrong-doing, and her husband had him cast into prison. There were two men in the prison who had been servants of Pharaoh for many years. The one had been his chief baker, and the other his chief butler. One night both had a remarkable dream. Joseph, by the gracious help of God, inter-

* If those twenty pieces of silver were *silver shekels* then Joseph was sold for about \$12.50.

preted their dreams correctly. As he had interpreted their dreams, so it came to pass. The chief baker was hanged, and the chief butler was reinstated into his former position. When the chief butler left the prison, Joseph said to him: "Think of me when it shall be well with thee, and show kindness, I pray thee, unto me, and make mention of me unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house; for, indeed, I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews; and here also have I done nothing that they should put me into the dungeon." But the chief butler forgot all about Joseph. After two years had elapsed, Pharaoh had a dream also, and he called together all the wise men of his kingdom that they might interpret his wonderful dream, but they could not. Now the chief butler remembered the promise which he had given Joseph two years ago, and he told the king of Joseph, crying out: "*I do remember my faults this day!*" It pained him that he had not thought of good Joseph all the while. He realized that he had sinned against him. He grieved over his sin, and he openly confessed it. Yes, he did all within his power to persuade Pharaoh to call Joseph and have him interpret his dream. The king did as his chief butler had asked him to do. Joseph was gotten out of the dungeon and taken to the king. Pharaoh told him of the wonderful vision he had in his dream, and Joseph interpreted it. Pharaoh was so well pleased with Joseph's interpretation that he put his ring on Joseph's finger, a golden chain about his neck, and arrayed him in a beautiful and costly gown; yea, even made him governor of the whole land of Egypt.

The chief butler had only sinned against God indirectly, but, nevertheless, he remembered his sin and confessed it. He did the right thing, for that is what God wants sinners to do. And, to be sure, He does not exempt anyone of us from this obligation.

If we would end this old year in a manner that is pleasing to God, we must remember our sins this eve. If we would not do it, God would not be pleased at all, and we could not end this year as truly penitent sinners.

If we look back to the old year, we shall find that we often have sinned, for we frequently have done that which God has forbidden and have neglected to do that which we should have done. We have become guilty of many sins, for we have sinned in thoughts, desires, words, and deeds. That this is true, we shall fully realize, if we look into God's mirror, that is, if we compare our lives with the Law of God. A mirror never tells a lie. If

we look into the mirror of God's Law, my beloved friends, we shall behold lots of moral filth, many sins and shortcomings. The great trouble with most people is that they do not look into God's mirror, that is, they do not examine themselves according to the Ten Commandments, but they rather look into their own, self-made mirror, their own fancies and imaginations, and therefore they do not see a true picture of themselves. They imagine that they are not at all such great sinners. They will tell you, that they keep God's commandments, and that, therefore, they could not fail to lay hold on life everlasting. But they are only deceiving themselves. One will tell you that he truly loves the Savior and His Word, but he deceives himself, because everyone who truly loves the Lord and His Word will also diligently hear and gladly learn it. That is what most people do not do. People, who are negligent in attending divine services, are not of God, for the Savior said: "He that is of God heareth God's words; ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God." John 8, 47. Another will tell you, "I am no murderer; I have not taken the life of any man," but he is only deceiving himself, for the Bible says: "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer; and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him." 1 John 3, 15. Another will say, "I am not an adulterer, for I have kept the Sixth Commandment," but he is only deceiving himself, for the Bible says: "Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." Matt. 5, 28. Another will say, "I am not a thief, for I have never taken anything which belonged to my fellow-men," but he is only deceiving himself, for the Bible says: "Thou shalt not covet." Rom. 13, 9. Still another will tell you, "I have tried to do the best I could, and therefore the Lord will be satisfied," but he is only deceiving himself, for it is written: "Whosoever shall keep the whole Law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." James 2, 10. Only by the Law is there a knowledge of sin (Rom. 3, 20). If we neglect to look into God's mirror, the Law, we shall be unable to realize our moral, spiritual filth, our sinfulness. And as long as we do not realize our sinfulness, our transgressions of the divine Law, so long we have no longing for the Savior, nor for forgiveness of our sins, and therefore we cannot receive forgiveness. And without God's forgiveness we cannot end this old year in a God-pleasing manner. Of this fact I shall now speak to you in the second place.

"I do remember my faults this day!" Thus, beloved friends, the butler cried out. It grieved him intensely that he had sinned; had wronged Joseph. He wished to say, "Oh, that I had remembered Joseph before this day, so that he would not have been obliged to suffer imprisonment for such a long time!"

The chief butler had sinned against his fellow-man, against Joseph, and only indirectly against God. He was a heathen man, and he knew not the true God, nor His commandments. And yet, it pained him very much that he had sinned against Joseph.

We, beloved fellow-Christians, are not heathen people; we are Christians; we know the true God and His holy will from the Ten Commandments, for we have His Word, and His Word is preached to us from year to year. Therefore we should, indeed, be very alert in remembering our faults, our sins, and in confessing them to God. It is, indeed, very deplorable that we so often have sinned against our fellows, but it is by far more deplorable that we have so often sinned against the holy and just God; against Him, who has been so benevolent and gracious to us from the days of our youth even to this very present! Oh, how sorry we should be that we have so frequently offended against Him! Indeed, we should implore Him for His forgiveness. If we will not do that, then, beloved friends, we cannot receive His forgiveness, and, therefore, we cannot end this old year in a God-pleasing manner.

God is very gracious unto poor sinners for Jesus Christ's sake. If we will only feel sorry on account of our sins, and implore Him for His forgiveness, He will forgive all our sins unto us. That this is true, we learn from many passages of the Bible. When King David had sinned against God and man, and had confessed his sins unto the Prophet Nathan, Nathan, in the name and by the command of God said unto the penitent David: "The Lord hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die." 2 Sam. 12, 13. When St. Peter wept over his sins, Jesus forgave him, and reinstated him into his apostleship. When the malefactor on the cross penitently asked the Lord: "Remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom," Jesus said unto him: "Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise." Luke 23, 43. Yes, as often as poor sinners penitently remembered their sins and asked God for forgiveness, He always forgave them all their sins. Just think of the publicans and sinners who came to Jesus imploring

Him for His mercy and forgiveness, and how He forgave them! So it is to this very day. If we will only repent, the Lord will gladly forgive us and accept us as His own.

My dear friends and fellow-Christians, if we would end this old year in a God-pleasing manner, we must do what all true Christians have done at all times, and what all true Christians do to this day: We must feel sorry for our sins and implore God to forgive us for the sake of Jesus Christ, our dear Savior. God will accept every sinner who comes to Him with a penitent and believing heart, even though his sins be as scarlet, and red as crimson, for He Himself has said: "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord. Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red as crimson, they shall be as wool." Is. 1, 18.

Let us, then, go to Him this eve as poor penitent sinners, saying with all our heart:—

Just as I am, without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidst me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come! I come!

Just as I am, and waiting not
To rid my soul of one dark blot,
To Thee, whose blood can cleanse each spot,
O Lamb of God, I come! I come!

Just as I am, though tossed about
With many a conflict, many a doubt,
Fightings and fears within, without,
O Lamb of God, I come! I come!

Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind;
Sight, riches, healing of the mind,
Yea, all I need, in Thee to find,
O Lamb of God, I come! I come!

Just as I am—Thou wilt receive,
Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;
Because Thy promise I believe,
O Lamb of God, I come! I come!

Just as I am,—Thy love unknown
Has broken every barrier down,—
Now to be Thine, yea, Thine alone,
O Lamb of God, I come! I come!

Amen.

— 53 —

New Year's Day.

Matt. 11, 28—30.

Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.

Again a new year has made its advent. It is by the grace of God that we live to welcome it. If God had dealt with us according to our deserts, none of us would be here today, for we have deserved nothing but God's displeasure, wrath, and punishment. If we look back to the old year, we must confess that we have often insulted the holy and righteous God by our transgressions of His divine Law. If we look into the mirror of His holy Law and examine ourselves, then, beloved friends, we shall see myriads of sins and iniquities of which we must plead guilty. In thoughts, desires, words, and deeds we have sinned; for we have not always loved God, as we should have loved Him. We have not always called upon His holy name in every trouble, nor have we always praised and thanked Him for His manifold gifts which He, in loving kindness, did bestow upon us. We often have neglected to hear His Word, and have not always gladly heard and learned it. We have not always honored our parents and masters, nor did we always love and obey them as we should have done. And have not our hearts often entertained thoughts of hatred and anger against this one or that one of our fellow-men and fellow-Christians, and sinful desires towards them? Have we not often coveted that which belonged to others, and which we should not have coveted? And how often did not our tongue speak evil of this person or that one, and thus bore false witness against our neighbor! Yea, if we will only look into the mirror of God's divine Law aright, then, alas! we shall see our soul covered with filth, and, if we be true Christians, we will be ashamed of ourselves and we shall deeply deplore our many shortcomings, sins, and iniquities.

Today we begin a new year. We are aware of the sad fact that, if we outlive it, we shall have the same old story to tell, namely, that we have not fulfilled the pledges which we made anew this day. At the end of this year we will be compelled to confess what we must confess today, namely, that we are sinners,

who deserve nothing but God's displeasure, wrath, and punishment.

May we, then, not expect our Savior to turn His back upon us, or to set His face against us in just anger? Can we expect to have Him as our Friend in this new year? What did this or that friend of yours do, after you had insulted him repeatedly? Did he not cast you aside? And will not Jesus do the very same thing with us sinners today? Our own conscience tells us that we surely deserve His anger; and the devil tells us that Jesus will have nothing to do with sinners, such as we are. But what does Jesus Himself have to say? He says that He still loves us, and that He still wants to save us from all our sins, from death, and from damnation. And in order to encourage us to come to Him for help, He so *graciously invites us to come to Him*. Yes, Jesus is a true friend indeed! Our Friend, when all other friends turn their backs on us. Let us then, beloved friends, by the assistance of the Holy Spirit and in accordance with our text now consider:—

Our Dear Savior's New Year's Invitation: "Come unto Me, All Ye That Labor and are Heavy Laden, and I Will Give You Rest."

We shall hear,

1. *Who those are that labor and are heavy laden.*
2. *Why Jesus so graciously invites them to come unto Him.*
3. *Why they should cheerfully accept His gracious invitation.*

1.

"Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden!" Such is the dear Savior's gracious invitation to all those that labor and are heavy laden. Indeed, a gracious and precious invitation!

Who are those that labor and are heavy laden? What people does Jesus mean, when He says: "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden"?

Jesus Christ is above all a *spiritual* Savior, a Savior from sin, death, and eternal damnation, and, therefore, He above all others means those, who are spiritually heavy laden and labor under a heavy spiritual burden.

Not all men are spiritually heavy laden. The spiritually heavy laden are those who realize that they are great sinners, because they have so frequently transgressed the holy command-

ments of the Lord in their thoughts, desires, words, and deeds, and that they therefore have deserved God's displeasure, wrath, and punishment on account of their sins, and who are sincerely sorry that they have sinned against the holy and just God, and who, nevertheless, would like to be eternally saved, but do not know how they can be saved, and therefore ask, "What must we do to be saved?"

In the fifteenth chapter according to the Gospel of St. Luke we read that all the publicans and sinners drew nigh unto Jesus to hear Him. When the self-righteous Pharisees and scribes saw that the Lord accepted those penitent publicans and sinners, they murmured, saying: "This Man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them." The Pharisees and scribes were not such people, who were spiritually heavy laden; they did not realize that they had deserved nothing but God's displeasure, wrath, and punishment on account of their sins; no, they were self-righteous and self-satisfied people, and they believed that they were good enough to be taken into heaven by God. This they believed, because they had not made themselves guilty of coarse outbursts against the Law of God. They really believed that only the coarse outbursts against God's holy Law were sins worthy of damnation. That every transgression against the Law of God in thoughts, desires, and words, is indeed a great and damnable sin in God's sight, they would not admit. They were not spiritually heavy laden people, because they were spiritually blind. But the publicans and sinners realized that they had grievously offended God by their transgressions of His holy Law, and they were sorry that they had sinned, and they tried to get rid of their sins and be eternally saved. They were spiritually heavy laden people; they wanted an answer to the most important question: "What must we do to be saved?"

Again, think of Luther and his times! Luther had been reared in the false doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that a sinner must appease the wrath of God over sin by all kinds of good works and sacrifices. Though Luther had led a moral life and had not given himself to vices, which were so prevalent in his time among good Roman Catholics, he, nevertheless, knew that he had often sinned against God in his thoughts, desires, and words, and that he deserved nothing but God's wrath and punishment. He tried his very best to appease the wrath of God over his sins. He fasted, made

pilgrimages to the shrines of real and supposed saints, prayed the Ave Marias and other prayers to the saints very punctually, read masses very conscientiously, and yet, he found no peace for his troubled soul, for he knew that he was not perfect in keeping God's holy Law. He labored and labored in order to gain the good will of the Lord, but the more he labored in order to gain God's favor, the more his conscience upbraided him for his shortcomings, and he would have succumbed under his spiritual burdens, had he not found the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ. While Luther was laboring and heavy laden, many of his fellow-monks and fellow-priests laughed at him, and advised him to follow their example, that is, they told him to buy indulgences and all should be right. They were not heavy laden.

It is to the spiritually heavy laden, who labor under a heavy weight of spiritual burdens, and cannot find peace and quiet for their troubled souls, that the gracious invitation of Jesus is extended.

And why does He so graciously invite them to come unto Him? This question I shall now answer in the second place.

2.

Why does Jesus so graciously invite those that labor and are heavy laden to come unto Him? He Himself gives the answer to this question in our text, when He says: "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and *I will give you rest.*"

The weight of unforgiven sins is something terrible. There is nothing that will cause a poor sinner, who realizes his sinfulness and God's anger over sin, more distress than the thought that his sins are too great to be forgiven. Have you ever come into contact with such a person that was given to despair on account of his sins? Oh, it is a terrible and sad sight to behold such a person! During the first year of my ministry I was called to the sick-bed of an honorable lady, not a member of my congregation, however. She became suddenly ill during the night, and her pastor could not be gotten. While I went to her home, I thought to myself that it would be very hard for me to convince her of her sinfulness, as she was an honorable lady in every respect. But when I came to her bed-side, she cried out saying, that she could not be eternally saved, because she was such a miserable sinner, and had deserved nothing but God's wrath and punishment. Yes, she was laboring under a terrible weight of

spiritual distress, she was heavy laden in deed and in truth. What was to be done? I took out my Bible and read many of the most precious passages of God's grace toward poor sinners to her, and I pictured Jesus to her in the true light, that is, I held Him up to her soul as the one and only Savior of poor sinners. But all to no avail. She simply would not believe that Jesus would accept her. She said time and again, "What you tell me from God's Word is not intended for me, for I am too great a sinner." If she had died then, she would have despaired and been eternally lost. By the kind providence of the gracious God she recovered. It is just such people, my beloved friends, whom Jesus so graciously invites to come to Him, because He wants to give them rest for their troubled soul. That is the reason why He became man, that He might suffer and die for the sins of mankind, so that every sinner might be eternally saved. He Himself says: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3, 16. And again He said: "The Son of Man is come to save that which was lost." Matt. 18, 11. Jesus is the *Savior* of sinners, of lost and condemned sinners, and that is the reason why He wants them to come to Him. He is the *Physician* of the spiritually sick and dying, for He Himself said: "They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." Luke 5, 31. 32. Jesus is the *Redeemer* of sinful men, who has purchased and won them from sin, death, and the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy and precious blood, and His innocent sufferings and death, that they might be His own, and live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness. That is the reason why Jesus wants all poor sinners to come unto Him. O gracious invitation: "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest!" O blessed rest which Jesus gives to all, who accept His gracious invitation! It is a rest indeed, a glorious, blessed, and eternal rest! A rest of the soul, which passeth all understanding. O blessed therefore all, who accept His gracious invitation! Of this I shall speak to you in the third place.

Jesus says in our text: *"Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."* With these precious words He gives the reason why all poor sinners should come to Him. He promises that He will take from them *their* yoke, and lay on them *His* yoke, which He says, is easy, and *His* burden, which is light.

But, dear friends, does not Jesus rather frighten poor sinners when He speaks thus unto them? Are His words really an encouragement to poor sinners? Indeed, they are, if rightly understood.

What is meant by Jesus' yoke and by Jesus' burden of which He says that they are easy and light? The yoke and burden of Jesus are His Gospel. Many people think that it is a hard thing to accept the Gospel of Jesus, that is, to believe it and become a true Christian. They imagine that Christians have a very hard lot in this world. They say, "It would be a good thing to become a true Christian, but then one must deny this world with all its pleasures. Christianity makes this life so dreary." Thus the unbelievers and nominal Christians speak. They are just like the unbelieving Israelites, to whom the Lord said by Malachi: "Your words have been stout against Me, saith the Lord. Yet ye say, What have we spoken so much against Thee? Ye have said, It is vain to serve God; and what profit is it that we have kept His ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts?" Unbelievers and false Christians do not know what they say, when they say that true Christians are a burdened people. They consider themselves wise, but they are fooling themselves. They do not know how happy a true Christian really is; that the yoke of Jesus is not a yoke at all, and that His burden is not a burden at all. The burden of sin is indeed a very heavy one, and if people will not believe this to be a fact while everything goes well with them physically, in the hour of death they will realize under what a heavy weight they are laboring. But then, beloved friends, the true Christians shall fully realize that it is a most blessed thing to be a true Christian. Oh, how glad they will then be that they have accepted the gracious invitation of Jesus by true faith! While the self-righteous and self-satisfied people, who trusted in themselves, must then sink into eternal perdition under the heavy weight that is upon them,

the true Christians find that all evil things have dissolved themselves into nothingness, that they in reality have no weight at all to carry.

This Gospel-truth, beloved friends, I would like to impress upon your souls in such a manner that you shall never forget it. I believe that I cannot do it in a better way than by calling your attention to one of Aesop's wellknown fables. He tells us that at one time there was a burro that was carrying a heavy load of salt in a sack upon his back. The weight was so great that he, when he had to go through a creek, stumbled and fell down. But only a moment and the salt had dissolved itself, and the burro had no weight upon his back any longer; he got up and walked away unburdened. The next time he was loaded down with a big sackful of sponges. The weight was comparatively light, but the burro, wise in his own estimation, purposely fell down upon his knees when he came into the same creek. But he had greatly deceived himself, for the sponges became filled with water, and were so heavy that he was unable to rise again, and he was drowned.

This fable teaches us a very serious lesson, my dear friends, It teaches that all those, who will not take the yoke of Jesus and His burden upon themselves, that is, that all those, who will not accept the gracious Gospel-invitation, shall in the last hour be drowned in eternal perdition. But all those, who accept Jesus' invitation, who truly believe in Him, will find that in the last hour all their troubles of body and soul will dissolve themselves, and they have no burden to carry at all, but, like on angels' wings, they soar up into the Father's house, not made with hands, to be with their dear Savior forevermore.

Yes, blessed in all eternity all those that accept the gracious invitation of the dear Savior in our text: *"Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest!"*

May all of us accept this gracious new year's invitation of Jesus today! Let all of us go to Jesus, the one and only Savior of poor sinners, and stay with Him until our temporal death comes! Then, beloved friends, we shall find rest,—real, abiding rest for our soul. God grant this for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

Sunday after New Year.

Matt. 9, 9—13.

And as Jesus passed forth from thence, He saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom; and He saith unto him, Follow Me. And he arose, and followed Him. And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto His disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners? But when Jesus heard that, He said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice; for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

This world was not at all times what it is now. In the beginning everything was perfect, for God made nothing imperfect. All rational beings were holy, that is, they were without sin. God did not create any being in sin. He did not, for example, create some of the angels evil spirits; no, all angels were created holy, but some of them fell away from God, and they became devils. God, furthermore, did not create man a sinful being, but He created man in His own image, that is, in perfect holiness and righteousness, or without sin. But man did not remain what he was when he came forth out of the creative hand of God; for man also fell away from God, and became a sinful being. And ever since sin entered into this world all things became changed. Now there is neither perfection, nor sinlessness in man. Since the Fall there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not (Eccl. 7, 20). By nature all men are as an unclean thing in the sight of God, and their own righteousnesses are as filthy rags (Is. 64, 6).

The consequences of man's fall into sin are appalling. Man now is subject to all kinds of trials, tribulations, temptations, afflictions, sicknesses, and death: spiritual, temporal, and everlasting death. And no mere man could ever have changed these awful conditions. There was but One, who was able and willing to help sinful mankind, and this One was none other than the Man Christ Jesus, the Godman Savior of the world. God made divers promises concerning this one and only Savior by the mouth and pen of His prophets. And when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the Law, to redeem them that were under the Law, that they

might become His children (Gal. 4, 4. 5). Yea, the Son of God became man in order to save that which was lost (Matt. 18, 11). As the Savior of sinful men Jesus is held up to us in our text.

Jesus had been in His own city, that is, in Capernaum, and He had not only preached the Gospel to multitudes of sinful men, but He had also performed all kinds of great miracles in order to prove that He, and He alone, is the Savior of mankind. Leaving Capernaum, He went to the seashore, and on His way thence, He came to a custom house. There he found a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom. Most probably Matthew was not a stranger to Jesus, but a man who had already embraced Jesus as His Savior, for Jesus said to him, "Follow Me." Thus He would not have spoken unto him, if he had not become one of His disciples already. "And he arose, and followed Him."

But as Matthew held a public office, it was necessary for him to turn over the office to some other man, and wind up his business. After he had done this, he, as other evangelists tell us, gave a farewell supper to his friends, and he also invited Jesus and His disciples to the supper. Jesus accepted the invitation. He sat at meat with many publicans and sinners. But, as always, there were present some men whom, most probably, Matthew had not invited at all,—intruders, namely, some Pharisees and scribes. When they saw that Jesus sat at meat with publicans and sinners, they murmured, saying,—not to Jesus Himself,—but to His disciples, "Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?" When Jesus heard that, He said to them: "*They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.*" This old adage, which Jesus called to their minds, was meant to set them right. This saying of Jesus shall now be the theme for my present discourse. By the assistance of the Holy Spirit and in accordance with our text, let me call your devout attention to this saying of the Savior:—

"They That be Whole Need not a Physician, but They That are Sick."

Let us inquire,

1. *Who they are that are whole and, therefore, not in need of a physician, and*
2. *Who they are that are sick and, therefore, are in need of a physician.*

1.

Who are they that are whole and, therefore, not in need of a physician? Physically those are whole, who are in good health. The physically robust never think of going to a physician, for they are not in need of his help or services. Spiritually those are whole, who are perfectly holy and righteous, who are sinless. The holy angels, for example, are spiritually whole and not in need of a spiritual physician. Our first parents, Adam and Eve, were sinless, perfectly holy and righteous, when they came forth out of the creative hand of God, and therefore they were not in need of a spiritual physician. But by the Fall they became spiritually sick, sick unto death, and therefore in need of a spiritual physician. And God Himself became their Physician when He came to them after the Fall and made them the gracious promise of a Savior. But since the Fall no human being is spiritually whole by nature.

There is not now, nor has there ever been a spiritually whole man on earth since the Fall, nor will there ever be such a one until the end of this world. But, my dear friends, there are very many who *imagine* that they are spiritually whole and, therefore, not in need of the Great Physician. Such people also were the Pharisees and scribes. They were really of the opinion that they were spiritually whole, and not at all in need of the Savior. They were self-righteous men, who trusted in themselves, and despised others. They trusted in their own righteousness and holiness, and they believed that they were able to save themselves. What kind of men they really were, Jesus so well tells us in that well-known parable of the Pharisee and the Publican, saying: "Two men went up into the Temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank Thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess." The Pharisees and scribes firmly believed that they were holy and righteous. Because they did not live in all kinds of gross sins, they imagined that they were without blemish in God's sight. They considered only the gross transgressions of the Law sinful. They believed not that unholy desires and evil words are actually sinful, actual sins. Especially were they very careful in fulfilling the traditions of the fathers. They, for example, never would eat, unless they had first washed their hands; they would not go into the

house of a Gentile; they fasted; they enlarged the borders of their garments in order to call the attention of their fellow-men to their very important selves (Matt. 23, 5); they would perform no work whatever on the Sabbath, not even an act of mercy. Yet at the same time they were the greatest hypocrites living, for they defrauded their fellow-men wherever and whenever they could do so. The dear Savior tells us that they devoured widow's houses, and for a pretense made long prayers (Matt. 23, 14). They paid the tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and yet they omitted to do the weightier matters of the Law. Jesus told them that they strained at gnats and swallowed camels (Matt. 23, 23, 24). Yea, they were miserable hypocrites, spiritually altogether blind, and yet at the same time they considered themselves spiritually whole, and therefore not in need of Jesus, the Great Physician. They, of course, were very much in need of Jesus and His salvation, but they did not and would not realize it. They were sick unto death, but at the same time they considered themselves whole. Jesus could not help them, because *they* would not let Him help them. He preached repentance unto them, He pleaded with them that they might see the errors of their ways, but they would not accept His help, His salvation. Poor deluded people!

The world, yea, outer Christendom, is full of such people. Many consider themselves spiritually whole, but in reality they are spiritually sick unto death. They trust in themselves, and they despise others. They rely upon their outward conduct, while their heart is full of pride and self-satisfaction. Because they do not live in outward shame and vice, but lead an outwardly honorable life before men, they imagine that they are good Christians. But the fear of God is not in their heart, nor faith in the one and only Savior of sinful men. They know nothing of true faith, nor do they care to know. They do not know the Gospel, nor do they care to learn it, for they surmise that they are not in need of the Savior, whom the Gospel holds up to lost men. Their whole religion consists in this maxim, "Be good, do good, and you shall be eternally saved." And this wishy-washy religion they call Christianity. They speak very much about the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of men, and yet, they love neither God nor men, but only themselves. Whenever the eyes of men cannot see them, they do anything and everything which they like. Oh, the miserable hypocrites! They consider it a great sin to

smoke, or to read a Sunday newspaper, or to take a sip of wine in the celebration of the Lord's Supper, but at the same time they defraud and cheat their fellow-men whenever they can. Yes, during the World War these very people, who outwardly paraded themselves as the most loyal citizens of our beloved country, cheated and defrauded our Government out of thousands, yea, millions of dollars, as is now wellknown to everyone. Oh, these miserable hypocrites! Very children of the devil! And yet, they wish to be considered the very elite of the Christians. They consider themselves spiritually whole, and therefore not in need of repentance. If you talk to them about true repentance, and about Jesus Christ, the one and only Savior of sinners, without whom there is no salvation for any man, they will at once begin to abuse you. Oh, the poor, self-deceived people that they are! Jesus cannot save them, because they are not looking for a Savior, such as Jesus is: a Savior from sin, death, and eternal damnation. There is not the least difference between them and the Pharisees of old.

I do hope, my beloved friends, that none among you are so miserably blind as to your spiritual state! Woe unto everyone who trusts in himself, who thinks himself spiritually whole and, therefore, not in need of the Great Physician, Jesus Christ!

But, in the second place, let us also inquire, who those are that are sick, and therefore in need of a physician.

2.

Matthew had been a great sinner, for he had defrauded his fellow-men; he had been a thief. And the other publicans, who were invited to his supper, had been such men as he. Others had been great sinners, men, who had wallowed in all kinds of crime and shame. Indeed, a lot of outcasts they had been. People would point to them with their fingers, and say, "Behold, there they go, — miserable culprits!"

But these men also had a conscience, just as all men have a conscience. And at times their conscience would accuse them very hard and tell them, unless they would change, they could not expect anything else than damnation. But that was all their conscience did and could do. It could only condemn them, but it could not help, not save them. At times these very men were, indeed, very miserable at heart, and despairing. They knew very well that they could not help and save themselves; they realized

their spiritual sickness, their sin and iniquity. They also went to hear and learn what the learned scribes, the preachers in those days, had to say; but what they heard out of their mouths could not save them, for the scribes knew nothing of the saving Gospel; they did not preach the saving Gospel, but only morality, which cannot save, just as most preachers are doing nowadays.

When these miserable men heard about Jesus, they went to hear Him also. When they heard Him, they became convinced that He was the Helper indeed, the Great Physician, such as they needed, the Savior from sin, death, and damnation. They embraced Him as their one and only Savior; at least many of them did, and thus the "Helper of the helpless" became their Helper, their Savior.

Who, then, beloved friends, are those that are sick and, therefore, in need of the great spiritual Physician Jesus Christ? The answer to this question is not hard to find. They are those, who realize their sinfulness, who know and believe that they, on account of their sins have merited God's wrath, displeasure, temporal and eternal death; who are sorry that they thus have sinned against the holy and just God, and that would like to get rid of their sins and gain God's favor. The spiritually sick are those who, like the Philippian jailor, ask, "What must I do to be saved?" Or who, like the publican in the Temple, smite upon their breast and cry out, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" They realize their helplessness, and their need of a Savior, such as Jesus is. They rejoice and are glad that God did send forth His only-begotten Son to redeem sinful men, and they put all their trust in Jesus' blood and righteousness. And thus they are healed of their sickness, they are eternally saved, for it is written: "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." And again it is written: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Therefore Jesus Himself told those self-righteous Pharisees and scribes in our text: "*But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice; for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*" Jesus is the Savior of sinners, that is, of those people that realize their sinful state and accept Him as their Savior from sin by true faith.

How is it with you, my beloved friend? Are you such a one, who realizes that he is spiritually sick unto death, and that

Jesus, and He alone, is the one and only Savior and Physician, who is able to heal and save him? Blessed are you, my dear friend, if you are such a one, for Jesus has come into this world to save such sinners. He invites such sinners to come unto Him, saying: "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Matt. 11, 28. And again He said: "Him that cometh to Me, I will in no wise cast out." John 6, 37. Accept these gracious invitations of the dear Savior by true faith, and you will be healed from all your spiritual diseases!

Matthew invited many sinners and publicans. He did it that they might meet Jesus, hear Him, and accept Him as their spiritual Physician, as their one and only Savior. And, no doubt, many of those publicans and sinners repented and became disciples of Jesus. Thus, beloved friends, we Christians should invite especially those that know not the true Gospel to come and hear it; we should be zealous missionaries.

And, in conclusion, let me also call your attention to Zachaeus, a man who also had been a publican and great sinner. When he found Jesus and accepted Him as his Savior, he became very zealous in good works in order to prove his faith in Jesus. Go thou, my dear friend and fellow-Christian, and do likewise! *Spiritual health is manifested by good works*,—works of love to God, our fellow-Christians, and our fellow-men.

God grant unto everyone of us true faith in Jesus Christ, the Great Physician and Helper of the spiritually sick and helpless, the Savior of poor sinners and, when our last hour is at hand, may He grant us a blessed departure from this present life to the life everlasting—

Where the saints of all ages in harmony meet
Their Savior and brethren transported to greet;
While the songs of salvation unceasingly roll,
And the smile of the Lord is the feast of the soul.

Amen.

Epiphany.

Acts 8, 26—39.

And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is a desert. And he arose and went; and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, was returning, and, sitting in his chariot, read Esaias, the prophet. Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near and join thyself to this chariot. And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the Prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him. The place of the Scriptures which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened He not His mouth; in His humiliation His judgment was taken away; and who shall declare His generation? For His life is taken from the earth. And the eunuch answered Philip and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this, of himself or some other man? Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus. And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water; and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still; and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing.

Today we celebrate the festival of the Epiphany,—the manifestation of the new-born Savior unto the Gentiles. St. Matthew says in today's Gospel-lesson: "Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the East to Jerusalem, saying, Where is He that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East, and are come to worship Him. When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem, of Judea; for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou, Bethlehem, in the

land of Judah, art not the least among the princes of Judah; for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule My people Israel. Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, Go and search diligently for the young Child; and when ye have found Him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship Him also. When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star which they saw in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary, His mother, and fell down, and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto Him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way."

Those men from the far East were wise and great men. Many believe that they were kings. By all means, they were great men in their own community. While Jewry first sent its most lowly people to worship the new-born Savior of the world, the Gentile-world sent its very wisest and greatest. And thus it was thereafter. The text for our present meditation also tells us of a man of great authority who came to Jesus, and there were many kings and princes, many wise and great men of the Gentile-world, who came to Jesus from those days to this very day. We also, my beloved fellow-Christians, are of Gentile descent, for our forebears were heathen people. By the missionary endeavors of others they were brought to the Savior, and so we are Christians, disciples of Jesus Christ. We have the very same duties to perform towards the Gentile nations which the apostolic Christians were called upon to execute, when the Lord said to them: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature." Mark 16. 15. We must also send out Pauls, and Peters, and Johns, and Philips, as the apostolic Christians did. That this is true, we can see from our text. By the assistance of the Holy Spiprit let me now call your devout attention to —

Two Important Facts Which This Story of the Ethiopian Eunuch and the Evangelist Philip Teaches Us.

It teaches,

1. *That it is the will of our Lord that we Christianize the Gentile nations, and*
2. *That He wants us to do it through the means of grace.*

1.

On the day of His majestic ascension into heaven the Lord Jesus told His disciples that they should be His witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea, in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth (Acts 1, 8). His disciples executed His command. They began to preach the Gospel in the city of Jerusalem. And in a short time a congregation had been founded there, aggregating five thousand members. From Jerusalem they went out into the different provinces. They cast out the Gospel-net at first in Judea, then in Samaria. And everywhere God's elect were gathered into the Christian Church. One man especially was very active in preaching the Gospel unto the semi-pagan Samaritans. His name was Philip. He was not the Apostle Philip, but an evangelist. He began preaching in the old capital city of the Ten Tribes, — in the city of Samaria. And the people gave heed to his preaching, and many became converted. The Apostles Peter and John also went into the province of Samaria to assist Philip. They carried on their mission work with great zeal, and the Lord blessed their missionary endeavors most wonderfully, for many Samaritans were converted to the Christian faith.

While the Evangelist Philip was in the very midst of his missionary activity, an angel of the Lord appeared unto him, enjoining him to go south to the way that "goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza." Philip obeyed, and went to the designated place. He knew that the place to which the angel had directed him, was barren of people, for it was in a desert. He, perhaps, wondered why the Lord had given him the command to go there, but he was soon to find out, for "*behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, was returning, and sitting in his chariot.*" For the sake of this man Philip had received command to go from Samaria down to a designated place on the way which led from Jerusalem to Gaza, and from thence to Egypt. From this fact it is evident that God wants His children to bring the saving Gospel also to the Gentile nations.

In the Epistle to the Hebrews it is said of the Lord: "Jesus

Christ the same yesterday, today, and forever." Jesus never changes. What was His will when He commissioned His disciples to go and preach the Gospel to every creature, is His will to this day. It is His will that we Christians of today bring the Gospel not only to those of our own blood, but also to others. The holy apostles preached unto people of divers nations on the first Christian Pentecost, for St. Luke tells us in the second chapter of the Acts that the Holy Spirit fell upon the apostles of the Lord, and endowed them with the gift of tongues, that is, with the gift to speak in all the different languages of the people who had come to hear them, so that all were astonished, saying to one another: "Behold, are not all these (apostles) which speak, Galileans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia (Asia Minor), Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God." The man spoken of in our text was an Ethiopian, a Negro. Yes, it is the will of the Lord that all nations should be Christianized by His disciples. The Jew, the Turk, the Gentile, the infidel; the Caucasian, the Negro, the Mongolian, the Malay, the Indian; the pauper, the beggar, the poor, the illiterate, as well as the king, the prince, the rich, the learned, the refined, in short, every man, woman, and child in this world should be made a true disciple of Jesus Christ. That is the will of the Lord.

All true missionary endeavors have but *one* aim and purpose, namely, to Christianize all those who are as yet not true Christians, or in other words, to make all people true disciples of Jesus Christ, so that they are eternally saved. Truly, every missionary endeavor which is undertaken without *this* aim and purpose, is vain. People can be Christianized only through the means of grace. This fact I wish to call to your attention in the second place.

2.

In our time and in our country there are many mission societies, and many and enthusiastic missionary conventions are held, and large sums of money are raised for missions and missionary endeavors at home and abroad, but, my beloved friends, I am very sorry that I must say that quite a number of these

societies, if their mutual deliberations are not being misquoted by the press, are not doing real Christian mission work. It seems that many believe that it is the aim and purpose of all missionary endeavors simply to *civilize* the barbarian in foreign countries, and to do *philanthropic work* at home. That is the aim and purpose, so it seems to me, which many have in view in their missionary endeavors. Such work, however, is not real Christian mission work, and the money spent for it, is not spent for Christian missions.

We often hear people say, "There are many highways which lead to Rome," and, so they contend, "There are many means through which Christians may do mission work." But that is very wrong. Christian mission work can only be done successfully through the *means of grace*. Which are the means of grace? The Bible recognizes as strictly such, the *Word of God and the Holy Sacraments*. That this is true, we learn from different passages of the Holy Scriptures.

What does our text teach us in regard to this matter? We are informed by it that the Ethiopian eunuch had been in the city of Jerusalem in order to worship the true God; but he did not accomplish his purpose at all, for he left Jerusalem without finding the true God and Savior. If he had found the true God and Savior in Jerusalem it would not have been necessary for the angel of the Lord to direct the Evangelist Philip to the way which led from Jerusalem to Gaza in order to teach the Gospel unto the eunuch. When Philip had come to the designated place, he saw a chariot in which there was a man, who was reading. The eunuch had a copy of the Book of Isaiah, and he was reading from it aloud, as it was customary for people to do in those days. Philip heard what he was reading, and he ran up to the chariot and asked the eunuch: "*Understandest thou what thou readest?*" The eunuch answered him: "*How can I, except some man should guide me?*" He requested Philip to come into the chariot and teach him. This Philip gladly did. The eunuch had been reading the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, in which the great prophet prophesied of the Savior and His atoning work for the redemption of a lost and condemned sinner-world. Philip explained that most wonderful chapter to him, and told him how all the prophecies had been fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus Christ. He told him how Jesus had suffered and died on the cross, and how He had been resurrected from death on the third day, and how, forty days

after His resurrection, He had ascended into heaven, charging His disciples to go into all the world, and make all nations unto His disciples by teaching them the saving Gospel and by baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and that the Lord Jesus had said: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16, 16). The Ethiopian eunuch believed the Gospel which Philip taught him, and while the holy evangelist was still telling him of Jesus and His work of redemption, they came to a creek in which there was some water, and the eunuch asked Philip to baptize him. And after he had confessed his faith in Jesus Christ, Philip baptized him. A Gentile man had become a true Christian, a true disciple of Jesus Christ. Ancient tradition says that the Ethiopian eunuch brought the saving Gospel to his countrymen, and thus became the founder of the Abyssinian Church.

To this very day, beloved fellow-Christians, there are no other means than God's Word and the Holy Sacraments through which a sinner may become converted, — *Christianized*. Christian mission work can be carried on successfully only through these means of grace. If we therefore would accomplish anything for the Lord and His blessed kingdom, that is, if we would make sinful and lost men disciples of Jesus Christ, then we must teach and preach unto them the Gospel of Jesus Christ and baptize them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost. There is no other way in which we can Christianize the world.

It is, indeed, very true that most people do not want the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but, nevertheless, it is also true that sinful, fallen man can be saved only by believing the Gospel and by being baptized. This being a Biblical truth, it is evident that we must bring the means of grace unto the divers nations on this earth. Consequently, we must send out missionaries and preachers to all of those, who are as yet sitting in spiritual darkness and in the shadow of death, so that they may learn of and believe the saving Gospel and be baptized. And this we must do to all of them whether they live in our own or in foreign countries. And as the number of those who are as yet not disciples of Jesus Christ is very large,* we must increase the numbers of our mis-

* There are more than a thousand million of people living

sionaries and preachers as much as we possibly can. And, of course, we must support those who are sent out in our stead and in our name; for a laborer is worthy of his reward (1 Tim. 5, 18). And let us not grow weary in our prayers and supplications for the success of Christian mission work!

Most beloved fellow-Christians, if we, who truly believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, by the grace and assistance of God and our dear Savior will prayerfully and cheerfully discharge the duties that are upon us as true disciples of Him, who gave His life for us and all mankind, so that all might be eternally saved, then our Christian mission work and our Christian missionary endeavors will not, yea, cannot, be in vain, for the Lord will prosper them in His own good time and according to His own good pleasure, for He Himself has given us and all Christians this precious promise: "For as the rain cometh down and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but wathereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: so shall My word be that goeth forth out of My mouth; it shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." Is. 55, 10. 11. "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord!" 1 Cor. 15, 58. So help us God for the sake of His dear Son Jesus Christ! Amen.

in this world who are not Christians. In China alone there are over 400,000,000, in India over 300,000,000, in Japan over 60,000,000. Besides these there are the many millions in Africa and on the different islands in this world.

First Sunday after Epiphany.

Ephesians 6, 1—4.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord; for this is right. Honor thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth. And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath; but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

As you well know, God has ordained three estates, namely, the *family*, the *church*, and the *state*. Without these, men would be mere brutes. These three divine estates always have been a thorn in the side of Satan. He, therefore, always has tried his very best to have them abolished. And his untiring efforts have not been altogether in vain. He has succeeded in turning multitudes of people against these three divine estates. There are multitudes of people who advocate the extinction of the family, the church, and the state. The free love enthusiasts would do away with the divine institution of marriage, and thus abolish the family; and the radical socialists and anarchists would do away with the church and the state, and thus abolish established society.

God ordained the estates of the family, the church, and the state for the furtherance of His glory and the physical and spiritual welfare of mankind.

The first of the three estates ordained by God is the family. What the spring is to the brook and the river, that the family is to the church and state. If things go right in the family, then, my beloved friends, the church and the state will flourish. If, however, the family decays, then the church and the state must also decay. The weal and woe of the church and the state, therefore, to a great extent depend on the conditions which prevail in the family. Oh, that all families in the world might be like unto the family of which St. Luke speaks in our today's Gospel-lesson. The family spoken of in our today's Gospel-lesson is, indeed, a model family for all people during all ages, for it was a truly Christian and happy one.

Joseph and Mary fulfilled their duties towards the Christ-child in a God-pleasing manner, and the Christ-child fulfilled His duties towards them in full obedience to the Fourth Commandment. Whenever parents follow the example of Joseph and

Mary and all children that of Jesus, then, beloved friends, the family will be a truly Christian and happy one. And that is what God requires of all families as we see from our text.

By the assistance of the Holy Spirit and in accordance with our text let us now answer the important question:

When Will a Family be a Truly Christian and Happy One?

Our text answers,

1. *When the parents fulfil their duties towards their children in a God-pleasing manner, and*
2. *When the children fulfil their duties towards their parents in the fear of the Lord.*

1.

Children are a precious gift of God, and, therefore, they should not be neglected by their parents. Children have a body and a soul, and, therefore, they have physical and spiritual needs. And these twofold needs must be supplied by their parents.

It is the duty of parents towards their children to provide for them the things which belong to the support of their body. Parents are in duty bound to give shelter, food, and raiment to their children. Most parents know this to be their duty in regard to their children, and, therefore, most of them also fulfil this duty, if it is within their power to do so. If parents were not willing to give shelter, food, and raiment to their children, then, my beloved fellow-Christians, they would not even do what the brutes do to their offspring, and they surely should not be worthy of our respect.

Furthermore, it is the duty of parents to give their children a good education, for a good education is necessary for their temporal welfare. The times have undergone great changes. Illiterate people can hardly make a bare living nowadays. It would be inhuman for parents to withhold a good education from their children, if they are in a position to give it to them.

But not the intellect only, but also the heart or soul of a child must be educated, for what should become of the soul of a child if it were neglected? Jesus Himself says: "What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world," that is, all temporal riches and worldly knowledge, "and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" Matt. 16, 26. Therefore it is the sacred duty of parents to give their children a good Christian training, so that they may learn to know how they can

be eternally saved. God in His Word enjoins all parents to train their children for Him and the life that is to come. That this is true, we see from our text, for it says: "*Ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath; but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.*" Again the Lord says in Deut. 6, 6. 7: "These words which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children." And of Abraham the Lord said: "I know him that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken of him." Gen. 18, 19. And that is what Abraham did, and his descendants followed his example, for Josephus, the Jewish historian, tells us that the Israelites began to instruct their children very diligently in the Word of God from their earliest youth, and that therefore the Law of God was engraved in the hearts of the Jewish children. That is also what Mary and Joseph did, as we see from today's Gospel-lesson. Look at Jesus! He is only a lad of twelve years, but everybody is astonished at His wisdom. He does not only give correct answers to the questions put to Him by the doctors of divinity, but He also asked them such profound questions that they were astonished, for St. Luke tells us: "And all that heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers." Joseph and Mary had diligently instructed the Christ-child in the Word of God. Once a year they went up to the city of Jerusalem to celebrate the feast of the Passover in the Temple. On the Sabbaths, however, they attended the services in the synagogue at Nazareth. They did not *send* Jesus to the services, but they *took Him along*. After the services they explained unto Him what His youthful mind had not understood. Thus it came to pass that the lad Jesus had such a profound wisdom when He was a mere child. We must not imagine, beloved friends, that Jesus did not have to learn, because He is the Son of God. While He was living in His state of humiliation He had to learn just like any other child. For this very reason St. Luke says of Him, that He *increased* in wisdom (Luke 2, 52). Jesus was so well versed in the Holy Scriptures, because He diligently studied them.

Joseph and Mary, yes, all pious Jews of the old dispensation, diligently instructed their children in the Word of God, and thus they did what the Lord enjoins all parents to do in our text. They obeyed God and brought up their children in the nurture and

admonition of the Lord. And up to this very day the Lord has not repealed this commandment: "Ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath; but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." If parents will not obey this commandment of the Lord, they commit a great sin. All parents must give an account unto the Lord on the Day of Judgment. And woe unto those parents that did not bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord! It would be a thousand times better for them, if they never had had any children at all.

If children are to be brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, then, my beloved friends, they must be taught the Word of God, as it is revealed unto us in the Bible. Without the Word of God no one can bring up his child in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. That is the reason why Jesus Himself enjoined His disciples to go into all the world, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; and to teach them to observe all things whatsoever He had commanded them (Matt. 28, 19. 20). If we would be true Christians we must not only bring our children to God in Baptism, but we must also teach them whatsoever the Lord has commanded us. If we would fulfil His commandment, then, of course, we must diligently teach our children the doctrines of the Bible, and if we have not the necessary talent or time to do it ourselves, then, beloved fellow-Christians, we must establish and maintain Christian schools for our children in which they are diligently instructed in the teachings of the Bible.

If all parents would bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, as for example, Abraham and Mary and Joseph did, then all families would be truly Christian and happy ones.

And now let me ask you a few questions, my beloved friends, questions of great and far-reaching importance to every one of you, whom God has privileged to be a father or a mother. Do you bring up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord? Do you consider the well-being of your child's soul to be of the greatest importance? Do you do all within your power to give your children a good religious training? Or do you belong to those parents, who think and say, "Religious training is only of secondary importance! By all means, we want our children to learn the things which are necessary for their temporal welfare,

so that they may acquire a high station in this present life! They themselves may take care of their religious necessities when they have grown up to be men and women!"? There are millions upon millions of so-called Christian parents in our country who think and speak thus. And what is the result? Their children grow up without a true and saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus, and many of them become the prey of antichristian sects, and when they must die, they do not know how a poor sinner can be eternally saved. Is that not terrible? Yea, even in this life their children will not be happy and contented. That is the reason why there are so many unhappy families in outer Christendom; that is the reason why there are twenty-five divorces to every one hundred marriages in our so-called Christian country. There is only one way of making this world better, and that one way is this one: Bring up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; give them a good religious training. If this were generally done there would not be so many unhappy, but many more really happy families in this world. Therefore, you parents, do all you can by the help of God to fulfil your sacred duties towards your children! Provide for the physical and spiritual welfare of your dear children to the very ability which God's grace provides! Then you will, by the grace and help of God, rear a truly Christian and happy family, and your family will become a source of blessing to both the church and the state.

But not only must all parents fulfil their sacred duties towards their children, but all children must also fulfil their sacred duties towards their parents. Of this I shall now speak to you in the second place.

2.

What duties have children towards their parents or their superiors? The Lord Himself answers this question in our text when He says by the pen of the great Apostle Paul: "*Children, obey your parents in the Lord; for this is right. Honor father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.*"

Doctor Luther so beautifully explains these words of our text thus: "We should fear and love God, that we may not despise our parents and masters, nor provoke them to anger; but give them honor, serve and obey them, and hold them in love and esteem." And the question, "Who are our parents and masters?" our Catechism answers thus: "Father and mother and all

those who, according to God's ordinance, are placed over us in home, state, school, and church."

The first duty of children towards their parents is this that they *honor* them. Children must never forget that their parents are God's representatives in the family, for God has placed them over the children. God wants all children to give honor and due respect to their parents, for He says in the Fourth Commandment and also in our text: "*Honor thy father and mother*; which is the first commandment with promise; that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth." As God promises to bless those children that honor their parents, so He, on the other hand, in all seriousness, threatens to punish all those that despise and dishonor them, for He says: "The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it." Prov. 30, 17. Children that dishonor their parents, dishonor God, and, therefore, they grievously sin against Him.

Furthermore, it is the sacred duty of children to *serve and obey* their parents. Our text says: "*Children, obey your parents in the Lord; for this is right.*" As parents are God's representatives in the family, children in reality serve and obey God, when they serve and obey their parents. That this is true, we do not only see from our text, which says: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord"; but also from other passages of the Bible. In Proverbs 23, 22 the Lord says: "Harken unto thy father that begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old." And in Colossians 3, 20 we read: "Children, obey your parents in all things; for this is well pleasing unto the Lord." And look at Jesus, my beloved friends, of whom our today's Gospel-lesson speaks. Though He is the very Son of God, and therefore the Lord of Joseph and Mary, He, nevertheless, serves and obeys them, for St. Luke says of Him: "And He went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them."

Finally, it is also the sacred duty of all children to hold their parents in *love and esteem*. This our text does not expressly state, but we all know that children cannot honor and obey their parents, if they do not hold them in love and esteem. Children that do not hold their parents in love and esteem, cannot hold God in love and esteem, for their parents are God's representatives. Children that do not even love their parents, whom they can see, surely cannot love God, whom they cannot see (1 John

4, 20). Think of it, beloved children, what your dear parents have done for you from the day of your birth even to this very day! They have provided you with everything that you needed. And what did they do whenever you were sick? Did they not do all for you that was within their power to do? And you should not love them? Why, you would be more ungrateful than unrational brutes are towards their sires, if you would not hold them in love and esteem. Shame upon all children that will not love their parents, and will not esteem them highly! God will surely punish such wicked children, if they do not truly repent.

Whenever children truly regard their parents as God's representatives, and of their own accord do for them what they can, obey them in all things in which God has placed their parents over them, and esteem them as a precious gift of God, then they are truly Christian children, and they will not only carry true happiness into the hearts of their parents, but also into their own hearts. Yes, God will bless them according to His gracious promises.

Indeed, beloved friends, whenever parents fulfil their sacred duties towards their children in a God-pleasing manner, and whenever the children fulfil their duties towards their parents in the fear of the Lord, then the family life will be a truly Christian and happy one. And such a truly Christian and happy family will become the source of manifold blessings to church and state. Oh, that all families might be truly Christian and happy ones! May God graciously bless all the families of our dear congregation! May He bless all parents and all children for the sake of Jesus Christ! Amen.

Second Sunday after Epiphany.

Genesis 24, 50—60.

Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, The thing proceedeth from the Lord; we cannot speak unto thee bad or good. Behold, Rebekah is before thee, take her, and go, and let her be thy master's son's wife, as the Lord hath spoken. And it came to pass, that, when Abraham's servant heard their words, he worshiped the Lord, bowing himself to the earth. And the servant brought forth jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment, and gave them to Rebekah; he gave also to her brother and to her mother precious things. And they did eat and drink, he and the men that were with him, and tarried all night; and they rose up in the morning, and he said, Send me away unto my master. And her brother and her mother said, Let the damsel abide with us a few days, at the least ten; after that she shall go. And he said unto them, Hinder me not, seeing the Lord hath prospered my way; send me away that I may go to my master. And they said, We will call the damsel, and enquire at her mouth. And they called Rebekah, and said unto her, Wilt thou go with this man? And she said, I will go. And they sent away Rebekah their sister, and her nurse, and Abraham's servant, and his men. And they blessed Rebekah, and said unto her, Thou art our sister, be thou the mother of thousands of millions, and let thy seed possess the gate of those which hate them.

Today's Gospel-lesson tells us of a marriage festivity which was held at Cana in Galilee. Jesus and His mother and His disciples were also present.

From the account of the holy evangelist it appears that the groom and his bride were poor people, for they had not provided enough wine for their wedding guests. But, having Jesus with them, they were not put to shame. The holy Evangelist John tells us: "And there were set six waterpots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece. Jesus saith unto them (servants), Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim. And He saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare it. When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was: (but the servants which drew the water knew;) the governor of the feast called the bridegroom, and saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse; but thou hast kept the good wine until now." Jesus had performed a great miracle. As St.

John says, it was His first miracle. By performing this great miracle, Jesus showed forth His glory, that is, He proved by this miracle that He is the very Son of God.

That Jesus Himself attended a marriage festivity proves that He honors the estate of matrimony. And it could not be otherwise as God Himself instituted marriage, for marriage is a divine ordinance. Even before the Fall God instituted marriage. It is His will that *ordinarily* men and women should live in the holy estate of matrimony, for He Himself said: "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make a helpmeet for him." And God made a woman out of one of man's ribs,* and brought her unto man. And when the man saw her, he said: "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall be one flesh." And all the patriarchs, prophets, and saints of God during the old dispensation lived in wedlock. And from the days of our Savior to the present time not only Christian laymen, but also apostles and preachers of the Gospel lived in the married estate. (See: Matt. 8, 14; 1 Cor. 9, 5; 1 Tim. 3, 2; Titus 1, 6).**

Yes, the estate of matrimony is holy; it is well pleasing unto God, otherwise He would not have instituted it. This is evident also from our text. In accordance with the same and by the assistance of the Holy Spirit let me now call your attention to:

The Holy Estate of Matrimony.

Let me show,

1. *What it really is.*
2. *How it should be entered.*
3. *Why God instituted it.*

* The sainted Prof. A. L. Graebner, D. D., in an article on Anthropology, wrote: "The father is here named as being the head of the family, to whom also the wife is to submit herself. But the wife is not her husband's slave. She was not taken from his head, to rule over him, nor from his feet, to be trampled upon, but from his side, to be a helpmeet to him, and from near his heart, to be loved and cherished, honored and esteemed." *Theol. Quart.*, III, 413.

** Romanists overlook these passages of Holy Writ altogether, otherwise they would not forbid their popes, cardinals, archbishops, bishops, priests, monks, and nuns to get married. See: 1 Tim. 4, 3.

1.

Our text is taken from the beautiful story of Isaac and Rebekah. After his wife Sarah had departed this life, Abraham wanted Isaac to enter the holy estate of matrimony. But he did not want his son to marry a heathenish woman. He therefore sent his servant Eliezer to his native country, to his kindred, to get a wife for Isaac. After Eliezer had sworn unto Abraham that he would fulfil his wish, he and some other men departed for Mesopotamia. When they arrived there Eliezer prayed unto the Lord that He should let him know what damsel He had selected to be the wife of Isaac. And the Lord fulfilled his wish; He answered his prayer. The damsel God had selected for Isaac was none other than Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel, and the sister of Laban. Eliezer asked Bethuel and Laban whether or not he could take Rebekah with him to become the lawful wife of his master's son Isaac. They had no objections to offer, but they wanted Rebekah to answer that question herself. And she answered it in the affirmative, that is, she said that she wanted to go with Eliezer and become the wife of Isaac. And when she had declared her willingness to have Isaac for her husband, she had entered the holy estate of matrimony in the sight of God; she was married to Isaac.

Now what does that mean? What is marriage? What did she consent to do? She consented to live in a life-long union with Isaac. That is marriage. Marriage is the *life-long union* of a man with a woman as with his wife. And it is God's will that only *one man* and *one woman* should be united in holy wedlock, for He made but one woman for Adam, and brought her to him to be his wife. Polygamy, that is, that a man has more than *one* wife, or polyandry, that is, that a woman has more than *one* husband, is contrary to God's will, and consequently, it is a sin. That some of the patriarchs and kings during the old dispensation had more than one wife, was not in accordance with the will of God, and, therefore, it was sinful. Jesus Himself said to some Pharisees, who tempted Him: "From the beginning of creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; and they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh." Mark 10, 6—8.

Because marriage is a life-long union of one man and one woman it should not be broken. Jesus therefore said: "What

therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.” Matt. 19, 6. But He at the same time gave this ground for absolute divorce: “Whosoever shall put away (divorce) his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery.” Matt. 19, 9. With these words Jesus tells us that, if one of the spouses commits fornication, that is, becomes unfaithful to his or her spouse and lives with some other person as one flesh, the innocent party may get an absolute divorce from the guilty party. And in that case the innocent party sins not, for God Himself has granted unto the innocent party the right to take such action. If the innocent party, however, wishes to forgive the grievous offense to the guilty party, he or she may do so. The sinful act does not dissolve the marital bonds; but it gives the innocent party the choice of either dissolving the marriage-bond or of forgiving the offense” (Jesse). Again, if one of the spouses maliciously leaves the other, and will not be persuaded to go back, the guilty party breaks the marriage-bond, and the innocent party is free to marry another. That this is true, we see from 1 Cor. 7, 15, where St. Paul writes: “But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases.”*

In the second place, beloved friends, let me show you how according to God’s holy Word the estate of matrimony should be entered or how the marriage-bond should be formed.

2.

How the holy estate of matrimony should be entered or how the marriage-bond should be formed, we can learn from our text. We read in our text: “Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, The thing proceedeth from the Lord; we cannot speak unto thee bad or good. Behold, Rebekah is before thee, take her, and go, and let her be thy master’s son’s wife, as the Lord hath spoken.... And they said, We will call the damsel, and enquire at her mouth. And they called Rebekah, and said unto her, Wilt thou go with this man? And she said, I will go.”

* Fornication and malicious desertion are the only Biblical grounds for an absolute divorce. All other grounds, which the civil laws acknowledge for granting an absolute divorce, are not Biblical, and therefore a Christian cannot make use of them. If it should be impossible for one of the spouses to live under the same roof with the other, then he or she may get, what in civil law is called a *divorce a mensa et thoro*, a partial divorce; a judicial separation from table and bed.

From these words of our text two things are manifest. In the first place it is manifest that *Rebekah did not betroth herself to Isaac without the consent of her parents.*

When Abraham's servant came to Bethuel, he first spoke to Bethuel concerning the purpose of his coming. He told him that his master Abraham had sent him to get a wife for his son Isaac from among his kindred.* He also told him what he had done when he had come to the well, viz., that he had prayed to God to make known unto him, whom He had chosen to be Isaac's wife. And how through the willing service of Rebekah at the well he had come to the conviction that the Lord had heard his prayer, and that He had destined Rebekah to become the wife of his master's son. Then he asked Bethuel and Laban whether or not they were willing to let their daughter and sister go with him to join Isaac in holy matrimony. Both gave their consent. The next morning he said unto them: "Send me away unto my master. And her brother and her mother said, Let the damsel abide with us a few days, at least ten; after that she shall go." Also Rebekah's mother had given her consent to the betrothal of her daughter Rebekah to Isaac.

In the second place we learn from our text that *Rebekah was not compelled to betroth herself to Isaac*, for her people asked her: "Wilt thou go with this man? And she said, I will go." She voluntarily consented to enter the estate of holy matrimony with Isaac. When Rebekah had consented to go with Abraham's servant and be taken by Isaac as his wife, she, having the full consent of her parents, was *rightfully betrothed* to Isaac, and then and there she before God entered the holy estate of matrimony. So the marriage-bond is formed by a rightful betrothal, and not by the marriage-ceremony. That this is true, we see also from other passages of Holy Writ. St. Matthew tells us that Joseph had been betrothed to the Virgin Mary. When he saw that she was about to become a mother, he intended to leave her secretly, for he believed that she had committed fornication. But he did not leave her. Why not? Because the Lord sent an angel unto him, who said unto Joseph: "Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife; for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call His name JESUS; for He shall save His

* Rebekah was Isaac's second cousin.

people from their sins." Mary, the *betrothed* of Joseph is called his *wife* by the angel of the Lord. From this we see that in God's sight holy matrimony is entered by a rightful betrothal. Those who break their rightful betrothal, break the marriage-bond in the sight of God. That is how God sees it. Secret marriages or secret engagements, that is, an engagement or a marriage without the knowledge of the parents, are null and void before God. Children must not betroth themselves or get married without the knowledge and consent of their parents. If they do, they grievously sin, — not only against their parents, but also against God. They have transgressed the Sixth Commandment in the eyes of the Lord. Oh, that all those who wish to enter the holy estate of matrimony, would take these Biblical truths to heart! Oh, that all those who wish to enter the holy estate of matrimony, might pray to God for a pious spouse! If Abraham's servant so fervently prayed to God that He might give unto his master's son a God-fearing wife, how much the more should young Christians pray for themselves that God might give them a pious spouse, a spouse according to His liking. If this were generally done there would not be as many unhappy couples, and not so many unjustified divorces. If you would be real happy in your married estate, then, by all means, look for a God-fearing spouse, for beauty of soul and riches in God — godliness and purity of faith.*

But why did God institute marriage? This question I shall answer finally.

A.

3.

After Rebekah had declared her willingness to become the wife of Isaac, her people blessed her, saying: "Thou art our sister, be thou the mother of thousands of millions."

From this blessing it is evident that Rebekah's father and mother, brothers and sisters wished that she might become the mother of a great people. They considered the purpose of the holy estate of matrimony to consist in the procreation or begetting of children. And they were right, for that is the purpose which God had in view when He instituted the holy estate of marriage.

* Mixed marriages are not expressly prohibited by the Lord, but experience teaches that Christians do well when they avoid them. Husband and wife should be of one mind, especially in spiritual matters.

When He had united Adam and Eve as man and wife, He said unto them: "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth." And these very same words God spoke unto Noah and his sons after the Deluge, for we read in Genesis. 9, 1: "And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth." Isaac also expected Rebekah to bare children unto him, for in the twenty-first verse of the chapter following our text we read: "And Isaac intreated the Lord for his wife Rebekah, because she was barren; and the Lord was intreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived." And we know that she became the mother of Esau and Jacob. Jacob, whose name the Lord Himself changed to Israel, became the father of the Israelites, the people of God during the time of the Old Testament. Thus the wish of Rebekah's people was fulfilled, for she became the mother of thousands of millions.

The procreation of children is the chief purpose for which the Lord instituted the holy estate of matrimony. And woe unto those, who deliberately frustrate this divine purpose! They shall not escape God's just punishments. Children are a precious heritage of the Lord, and they should be welcomed by all married people. And if God gives children, He will also graciously provide for them the necessities of this life. Happy those married people who have many children, and who rear them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. History teaches us that the greatest men and women came from large Christian families. The Psalmist was right when he cried out: "As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them; they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate." Ps. 127.

Another purpose which the Lord had in view when He instituted the holy estate of matrimony was this one: He wanted people to lead a chaste and decent life. The intimate union existing between husband and wife is holy within wedlock. Therefore St. Paul wrote: "To avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband." 1 Cor. 7, 2. All persons that have not the gift of chastity should get married, and thus lead a chaste and decent life. May God protect and preserve the holy estate of matrimony to the welfare of the family, the church, and the state! Amen.

Third Sunday after Epiphany.

Luke 4, 38—44.

And He arose out of the synagogue, and entered into Simon's house. And Simon's wife's mother was taken with a great fever; and they besought Him for her. And He stood over her, and rebuked the fever; and it left her; and immediately she arose and ministered unto them. Now when the sun was setting, all they that had any sick with divers diseases brought them unto Him; and He laid His hands on every one of them, and healed them. And devils also came out of many, crying out, and saying, Thou art Christ the Son of God. And He rebuking them suffered them not to speak; for they knew that He was Christ. And when it was day, He departed and went into a desert place; and the people sought Him, and came unto Him, and stayed Him, that He should not depart from them. And He said unto them, I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also; for therefore am I sent. And He preached in the synagogues of Galilee.

A blessed Sabbath day had come to the inhabitants of Capernaum, for Jesus of Nazareth had made his advent to that sea-shore city. He had come from Nazareth, where He had lived many years, and where, the people in their great spiritual blindness, had disavowed Him, and in their madness of heart had tried to kill Him, because He had preached the saving Gospel unto them.

When Jesus had come to Capernaum, He, as was His custom, went into the synagogue and preached the Gospel of salvation. Among those people who had assembled themselves together in the synagogue, there was a demoniac, that is, a man, who had a spirit of an unclean devil, and when he heard and saw Jesus, he began to cry out with a loud voice, saying: "Let us alone; what have we to do with Thee, Thou Jesus of Nazareth? Art Thou come to destroy us? I know Thee who Thou art: the Holy One of God." And Jesus rebuked him, saying: "Hold thy peace, and come out of him, and hurt him not." And they were all amazed, and spake among themselves, saying: "What a word is this! for with authority and power He commandeth the unclean spirits, and they come out."

The demoniac, whom Jesus pitied, and from whom He cast out the devil, cried out, saying, "What have we to do with Thee, Thou Jesus of Nazareth? Art Thou come to destroy us? I know Thee who Thou art: the Holy One of God." It was not the demoniac, but the devil in him that cried out this divine truth.

It was a cry of intense anger. If that devil could have done so, he surely would have destroyed Jesus, but he could not; for in deed and in truth, this Jesus of Nazareth was God manifest in the flesh, the Holy One of God, the very Son of the Almighty. Jesus is almighty, and the devil had to obey Him. But Jesus did not need, nor did He want the testimony of the devil. Although the devil is a liar, and the father of lies, he for once at least had spoken the truth, when he cried out in his impotent rage: "I know Thee who Thou art: the Holy One of God!"

Yes, Jesus of Nazareth is the very Son of the everlasting and almighty God. This divine fact is also attested by our text. In the same the holy evangelist calls our attention to the *credentials* of Jesus Christ, which were given Him by His heavenly Father, that He might prove His divine Sonship. By the assistance of the Holy Spirit and in accordance with our text, the subject for our contemplation shall therefore be:

Jesus of Nazareth Showing His Credentials to Men in Order to Prove His Divine Sonship.

These are,

1. *The great miracles which He performed by His own power, and*
2. *His preaching of the saving Gospel unto poor sinners.*

1.

The very first thing a representative of a foreign country does when he comes to Washington in order to represent his government is, that he identifies himself by the credentials, which his government handed to him when he left to represent it. Any man, claiming to be a representative of a foreign country, not showing his credentials, will not be accepted as such, not even if he is personally known to the officials of our country. Thus it always has been, and thus it will always be to the end of time.

When Jesus of Nazareth, therefore, began His public ministrations and made claim that He had come down from heaven, and out of the bosom of His Father, it was necessary, indeed, for Him to show His credentials given to Him by His heavenly Father to mankind. He was to be the one Mediator between God and men (1 Tim. 2, 5). If He had not been able to produce divine credentials in order to substantiate His claim, men would have had a perfect right to reject Him as a deceiver.

It is indeed true that Jesus already had been proclaimed the Son of God and the Savior of the world before He began His

public ministrations. When He was born in that lowly stable at Bethlehem, and when Mary, His Virgin-mother, wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger, heaven was opened, and, lo, the holy angels of God appeared upon this earth and proclaimed the incarnation of God's Son to the shepherds on the fields of Bethlehem. An angel-preacher had cried out the glad tidings of great joy to the shepherds, saying: "Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord." And when the angel had proclaimed his joyous message, all his fellows sang their memorable Christmas carol: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." The wise men from the far East had also come to Bethlehem, and had worshiped the Infant in the manger-cradle, and had laid costly presents at the feet of the Babe of Bethlehem. And when the Christ-child had been presented to His heavenly Father in the Temple, old Simeon had taken Him up in his arms, and had blessed God, saying: "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word; for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel." And when Jesus was twelve years old He had astonished the learned doctors in the Temple by His profound wisdom. But many years had elapsed, and most people had forgotten what had come to pass many years ago. We only read of Mary that she kept all these things and sayings in her believing heart (Luke 2, 51). When Jesus began His public ministrations it was necessary, yea, absolutely necessary, that He should show His credentials unto all humankind with whom He came into contact, so that all men might see with their own eyes and hear with their own ears that He is in deed and truth the very Son of the almighty and everlasting God, sent by His Father to sinful men as the Savior. And, most beloved friends, Jesus did produce His credentials in a manner that was overwhelming to all candid and fair minds. He did it in the first place by His innumerable great miracles. Jesus performed so many astounding miracles that St. John writes at the close of his Gospel: "And there are also many other things which Jesu did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written."

In our text St. Luke calls attention to some of these many miracles. He says: "And He arose out of the synagogue, and entered into Simon's house. And Simon's wife's mother was taken with a great fever; and they besought Him for her. And He stood over her, and rebuked the fever; and it left her; and immediately she arose and ministered unto them."

When Jesus healed the sick mother-in-law of the great Apostle Simon Peter, He performed a great miracle, for He simply spoke a word of rebuke to the fever and it left her, and the sick woman was well. Yes, the holy evangelist tells us that she "arose and ministered unto them." There is not now, nor has there ever been a mere man who was able to heal any one of a severe fever by a simple word of his mouth, as Jesus did. This proves beyond any doubt that Jesus of Nazareth is in deed and in truth the very Son of God.

In this Sunday's Gospel-lesson St. Matthew mentions two other miracles which Jesus performed on that memorable and blessed Sabbath at Capernaum. He tells us that Jesus was first met by a leprous man, who prayed, saying unto Him: "Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean. And Jesus put forth His hand and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed." Then the Roman centurion, living at Capernaum, come to Jesus and implored Him to heal his sick servant, saying: "Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him. The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldest come under my roof; but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. . . . And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour."

St. Luke, furthermore, tells us in our text: "Now when the sun was setting, all they that had any sick with divers diseases brought them unto Him; and He laid His hands on every one of them, and healed them. And the devils also came out of many, crying out, and saying, Thou art Christ the Son of God. And He rebuking them suffered them not to speak; for they knew that He was Christ."

From these words of our text we see that Jesus performed many miracles that very same day in the city of Capernaum. He healed all that came to Him or that were brought to Him, and

He healed them all by *His own power*. Yes, we know from other passages of Holy Writ that He even performed greater works than those were, which are enumerated in our text; for He even raised up the dead. Unto the dead young man at Nain He said: "Young man, I say unto thee, Arise!" And what happened? He did arise. Unto the dead daughter of Jairus He said: "Maid, arise!" And what happened? Her spirit came again, and she arose straightway. And to His dear friend Lazarus at Bethany, who had been dead for four days already, He said: "Lazarus, come forth!" "And he that was dead come forth." John 11, 43, 44. All these wonderful works of Jesus were indeed His credentials, given Him by His heavenly Father that He by them might prove His identity to mankind. That all of these miracles were really His divine credentials, we can see from the Book of Isaiah, for by the mouth and pen of this great prophet God had foretold that Messiah was to perform such wonderful works. Yea, it was also foretold by Isaiah that He should also preach the saving Gospel to poor sinners. This leads us to the second part of our discourse. Not only by His miracles, but also by His preaching He proved His divine Sonship.

2.

St. Luke tells us in our text: "And when it was day, He departed and went into a desert place; and the people sought Him, and came unto Him, and stayed Him, that He should not depart from them. And He said unto them, *I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also; for therefore I am sent.* And He preached in the synagogues of Galilee."

Yes, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came into this world also for the purpose of preaching the kingdom of God, that is, the Gospel of eternal salvation unto sinful and lost men. And that is what He did in every possible way. He preached the saving Gospel.

What, then, is the Gospel? Our Catechism answers: "The Gospel is the glad tidings of the grace of God in Christ Jesus." That is what Jesus of Nazareth preached. He knew only of the saving Gospel, that is, of God's grace for His sake. Every discourse or sermon which is without the glad tidings of God's grace in Christ Jesus, is not a Gospel-sermon. The Gospel cannot be preached without reference to Jesus Christ, the Godman Savior of sinful mankind. A Christless sermon or discourse may contain

very good and salutary exhortations on morals, but it is not a Gospel-sermon. You cannot preach the saving Gospel without mentioning Jesus Christ, the one and only Savior and Redeemer of sinful men.

Jesus Christ did not preach politics, though He admonished His hearers to be obedient to their government. He did not preach on the lives of great and pious men, such as Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Elijah, David, Solomon, John the Baptist, and others. He often mentioned these and other great men in His sermons, but He always mentioned them as such who believed in Him, the promised Messiah. He never directed the people to these and other men as saviors, but always and invariably to Himself. He always concentrated the minds of His hearers upon His own Godman personality. His person, and His work of salvation always were the subject of His preachments, of His sermons and discourses. And in this He is without parallel. The prophets always directed the minds and hearts of their hearers to God and to the promised Messiah. They always came, saying: "Thus saith the Lord"; or, "Thus saith Jehovah, the Lord God." So also the greatest of all mere men ever born of a woman, — John the Baptist. He did not at all preach himself, but only Jesus Christ, who was to come after him. And when Jesus Christ had made His advent, John the Baptist pointed with his finger to Jesus, saying: "Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world." John 1, 29.

When the Pharisees and chief priests of the Jews sent officers to Jesus to take Him captive, the men, whom they had sent, returned, and being asked by their senders: "Why have ye not brought Him?" answered and said: "Never man spake like this man." John 7, 32. 45. 46. That was true. No one ever preached as Jesus did. Let me give you a few examples, and you will readily admit that this is true. Jesus preached thus: "I am the Light of the world; he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the Light of Life." John 8, 12. "I am the Bread of Life; he that cometh to Me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst." John 6, 35. "I am the Resurrection, and the Life; he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die." John 11, 25. 26. "I am the Door; by Me, if any man enter in, he shall be saved." John 10, 9. "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no man cometh unto the Father,

but by Me." John 14, 6. "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest!" He cries out to poor sinners (Matt. 11, 28). And again He cries out to them: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on Me hath everlasting life!" John 6, 47. Many more similar sayings of Jesus could be adduced. It is true, Never man spake like this Man. Never could any man speak thus without committing blasphemy, for Jesus alone is the Godman. Therefore St. John rightfully says: "For the Law was given by Moses, but grace and truth (Gospel) came by Jesus Christ." John 1, 17. That is the reason why even Napoleon, who was not a Christian, had to admit: "I know men, and I dare say, that Jesus is not a mere man." Yes, beloved friends, the Gospel-preachments of Jesus Christ were in deed and in truth His divine credentials to a lost sinner-world. He, and He alone, is the Godman Savior of sinners, and, therefore, all true Christians will confess with Luther: "I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with His holy precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, that I may be His own, and live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, even as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true."

Indeed, this is most certainly true, for Jesus Christ is the Son of the almighty and eternal God, the Savior of the sinful world. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3, 16. May every one of us, my dearly beloved friends, believe in Him, and be eternally saved! Amen.

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany.

Genesis 7, 18.

And the waters prevailed, and were increased greatly upon the earth; and the ark went upon the face of the waters.

The words of the inspired writer in our text remind us of the Noachian deluge, which occurred about 2,350 years before the birth of Jesus Christ. It was the greatest of all cataclysms which this world experienced since the almighty word of the Creator called it into being.

The cause of this cataclysm was, as we all know from the Bible, the unbelief and wickedness of the people in general. The sons of God, that is, the believing and pious men wedded unbelieving and wicked women, and the results were most appalling from a spiritual viewpoint, for there was no longer a child-like fear of the Lord upon the earth. Noah and his family were the only ones who were pious, believing and trusting in Jehovah, and serving Him with a willing heart. The Lord had compassion upon the children of disobedience, and He commissioned Noah to preach repentance unto them, and offer them divine forgiveness. But his preaching was not heeded. So the Lord finally did what He had threatened to do, if they would not repent: He destroyed them by the Flood. The inspired writer tells us that the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and that the windows of heaven were opened, and that it rained for forty days and forty nights. All in whose nostrils was the breath of life, of all that was in the dry land, died. The only people that did not die in the waters were Noah, his wife, and his three sons and their wives. Noah and all of his had taken refuge in the ark, which they had built by the command of the Lord. Thus they were saved.

The ark was a large boat, 300 cubits long, 50 cubits broad, and 30 cubits high.* Its space, therefore, consisted of about 1,800,000 cubic feet. It has been said by unbelievers and scoffers

* Figuring a cubit at a foot and a half, the dimensions of the ark were 450 feet in length, 75 feet in width, and 45 feet in height. The cubic contents of the vessel thus exceeded 1,800,000 cubic feet, and afforded ample room for the purpose which the ark was to serve, being able, as has been demonstrated, to carry a cargo greater by one-third than any other form of like cubical content. *Kretzmann, Popular Commentary, Old Test., p. 16.*

that, if the ark had really been what the Bible says that it was, it should never have been able to pass through the Deluge unharmed that it surely would have sunk, for such an ark could not have withstood the heavy winds, which, as the Bible states, came upon the earth after the rain ceased, to dry up the waters. But unbelievers and scoffers overlook one fact, viz., that the ark could not sink, because it was the means which the almighty God Himself had chosen to save His people that were in it. To be sure, the rainstorm was great, and the waves shot up hundreds of feet, and the mighty winds dashed against it with might and main, but it could not sink, because the Lord held it in His hands. Finally He landed it on Mt. Ararat. Yes, all the waters, waves, storms, and devils together could not undo the will of the Almighty. His will is supreme at all times, and under all circumstances. With Him nothing is impossible; He can do whatsoever He pleases.

The wonderful story of the ark in the Noachian flood pictures unto us the fate of the Christian Church in this sinful and wicked world. Like as Noah's ark was tossed about by mighty tempests, and covered by the mighty rolling waves of the turbulent flood, so the Church of Christ must battle with the heavy winds and rolling waves of this unbelieving and ungodly world. But as the ark went upon the face of the waters, and as it finally reached Mt. Ararat in safety, so, beloved fellow-Christians, God's Ark will finally reach the beautiful summit of the celestial Ararat; for the storms and waves of the wicked world cannot sink it. To this comforting fact let me now direct your devout attention. The theme for my present discourse shall therefore be by the assistance of the Holy Spirit and in accordance with our text:

The Ark of the Lord on the Turbulent Waters of this World.

1. *It is tossed about by furious tempests and roaring waves, but*
2. *It cannot sink, because the almighty Lord Himself is in it.*

1.

The inspired writer says in our text: "*And the waters prevailed, and increased greatly upon the earth: and the ark went upon the face of the waters.*"

As soon as the ark was lifted up by the Flood, and began to

go upon the face of the waters, it was in danger from the tempests and waves which prevailed. How easily could it have been dashed against some mountains! The ark drifted upon the waters. The storms and the waves beat against it in great fury and, no doubt, Noah and his people became very much frightened at times. Surely, it must have appeared unto them at sundry times as though the ark must sink and they perish with it. Indeed, those days of the Flood were most trying days for Noah and all of his. Oh, how the devils would have rejoiced, if that ark had been sunk in the turbulent waters!

I have said that the ark is a type of the Christian Church. That is surely true. The Christian Church is tossed about by furious tempests and roaring waves on the turbulent waters of this wicked and unbelieving world. Hardly had it set sail for its voyage, and hardly had it left the shores, when it also had to contend with mighty winds and waves.

It is true, on the first Pentecost of the new dispensation there were not less than three thousand souls added to the Church of Jesus Christ. And for a few years everything went on smoothly. Many more members were added, so that in a short time it numbered over five thousand souls. The missionary endeavors of the holy apostles in the surrounding territory were not in vain. Everywhere souls were gathered into the Church. But, lo, after a few years of tranquility, the Church was fiercely attacked by its enemies, by both Jews and Gentiles. Persecution upon persecution came upon it. Those bloody persecutions of the Christian Church were the *storms* with which the Ark of God had to contend for many centuries. History tells us of *ten* great persecutions of the Christians during the first three centuries of the Christian era. At first the Christians were persecuted by the Jews only; but with the reign of that "great beast" among the Roman emperors, Nero, the persecutions of the Christians became general in all the Roman provinces throughout the world. And for three centuries thousands upon thousands of Christians were slain. Tacitus, the renowned Roman historian, tells us, that the Christians were tortured to death in the most cruel ways. He tells us, that some were nailed on crosses, many of them with their heads downward, and left to die. Others were sewn up in skins of wild beasts and exposed to the fury of vicious dogs. Others, again, were smeared over with combustible materials, then set on fire, and used as torches to illuminate the darkness of the

night. Others were tied to corpses, and then thrown away into some isolated places, and there they were left to starve to death. Many were burned at the stake. Many others were mutilated in their bodies, and then set free. In short, the true Christians were persecuted in the most cruel manner.

It often happens that during a great storm there are moments of perfect calm, only to be followed by a greater fury of the tempest. So it also occurred that, after the storms of the Ten Great Persecutions of the first three centuries, there were periods of calm. When Constantine the Great became Roman emperor at the beginning of the fourth century, the bloody persecutions of the Christians came to an end. Constantine himself became a Christian, and he forbade the persecutions of all Christians within the realms of his reign. But the calm was only temporary. During the Middle Ages the papacy again began the bloody persecutions of the true followers of Jesus Christ. During the time of the Reformation in the sixteenth century, the puppets of the Pope murdered, perhaps, as many disciples of Jesus Christ as the heathen emperors had murdered during the Ten Great Persecutions (A. D. 64—311). History tells us, that during the reign of Charles IX of France, during the night of August 24, 1572, about 100,000 French Protestants, called Huguenots, were slain by the papists. After the terrible massacre Pope Gregory XIII was the most jubilant creature in all the world. He instructed the French ambassador at Rome to inform his king that the massacre of the French Huguenots delighted him by far more than a hundred victories over the Turks.*

The bloody persecutions did not harm the Church of Jesus Christ. It was truth when St. Augustine said, "That the blood of the martyrs became the seed of the Church." The greater the bloody persecutions, the more were the accessions to the Holy Christian Church. The bloody persecutions prevented hypocrites

* Pope Gregory XIII celebrated the massacre as a Catholic victory by the firing of a triumphal salute from the Castle of St. Angelo, a brilliant illumination of Rome, and a *Te Deum* in the Cathedral of St. Peter's, in which the Pope and the cardinals assisted, the Pope offering thanks to God for "this signal mercy." Gregory ordered a medal to be struck commemorating the event, and caused the Hall of Kings in the Vatican to be adorned with a fresco representing the massacre. *Clare*, Library of Universal History, VI, 2121. See also Kurtz, Lehrbuch der Kirchengeschichte, II, 107, and *Great Leaders and Great Events* by Buchheimer, 244 ff.

from joining the church. In times of outward tranquility only too many people join the church for material gains; they want the Christians to patronize them in their business; they want customers for their wares, and therefore they join a church outwardly, while their hearts are afar from Jesus.

The ark of Noah in the great flood was not only obliged to contend with great and furious storms, which threatened its destruction, but also with the mighty waves, which threatened to sweep it into the awful deep. The *waves* of the turbulent waters of this world with which the Ark of God, the Church of Christ, must battle, are false doctrines, unbelief, error, and worldliness. By these waves many an occupant of the Ark of God has been swept overboard. Oh, how many dear Christians have remained steadfast in the faith during the storms of trials and distresses, and yet they were swept overboard by the one or other of these waves! Multitudes of Christians are drowned in eternal perdition by the false and antichristian doctrines of many so-called Christian churches, for in many of them the higher critics hold sway, and, as you know, they have ostracized the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ; they have banished it from cathedra and pulpit. And who can count the great numbers of those who are swept overboard by the wave of worldliness, which, in these latter days of the world, has forced its way into the churches!

Of course, my beloved friends, the waves cannot harm the Ark of God; they cannot sink her, neither can the storms destroy her, for the almighty God Himself is in her. Of this blessed fact I shall now speak to you in the second place.

2.

Some years ago at Coney Island, New York, scenes of the Flood were shown on a canvas. It was the work of human imagination, well contrived and splendidly executed. And, perhaps, it was not even a true picture. I believe that the real scenes of the Noachian flood were by far more horrifying than the pictures showed them to be. But anyone who saw those pictures cannot forget them as long as he lives. While they were shown women and children became wild with fears, and they screamed with might and main. Those pictures, at least to some extent, gave an idea of the terrible scenes of the Noachian flood over four milleniums ago. And to be sure, while that awful Flood was on, and while the storms beat against the ark, and the

mountain-high waves swept over it, the hearts of Noah and all of his trembled with exceeding great fear. It could not have been otherwise, even though they were true believers in Jehovah. They were also human, and in times of great catastrophes even the hearts of the very best Christians are not immune from fear and apprehension. That this was also the case with Noah and his people, we can see from the first verse of chapter eight, where the inspired writer tells us that God remembered Noah in the ark, that is, God heard and answered his entreaties and supplications, and landed the ark on Mt. Ararat. And when Noah came out of the ark he offered up burnt offerings on an altar, and thus he showed his gratitude unto the Lord for His gracious protection during those awful days of the Flood.

Yes, the ark did not sink; it could not sink, because the almighty God Himself protected it. The unseen hands of the Lord steered the ark; the Lord Himself was the helmsman. That is the reason why Noah's ark withstood all the furious storms and roaring waves, and landed on Mt. Ararat safely.

The Ark of God, as we have already heard, was often tossed about on the turbulent waters of this world during the last nineteen centuries, and yet, my beloved friends, it has not sunk, nor was it destroyed. Like the ark of Noah went on the face of the waters until it finally reached Mt. Ararat in safety, so the Ark of God, the Holy Christian Church, is still on the face of the waters of this ungodly and wicked world, and it will not, yea, it cannot, sink. It will finally reach the heavenly shores in safety, because the Lord Himself is at the helm, and His steering hand shall never fail Him. He Himself has promised, that even the gates of hell shall not prevail against His Church (Matt. 16, 18); and He cannot lie; His Word is eternal truth. Let persecutions come in the future, as they have come in the past, they will not, they cannot, destroy the Holy Christian Church. All those who imagine that the Church of Jesus Christ can ever be destroyed, are only deceiving themselves. The past history of the Church of Jesus Christ proves this statement to be an undeniable truth. How often have not the enemies of Christ and His Church united themselves for the overthrow of the Christian Church, but all their efforts were in vain. They often have dug a grave for the Holy Christian Church, and scoffers like Voltaire and Ingersoll had already composed the funeral dirges for the Holy Christian Church, but though worms have devoured their carcasses long,

long ago, the Holy Christian Church is still sound; yea, since the days of these scoffers the kingdom of God has been extended over a vast part of the globe, and it is extending its boundaries from year to year. Heaven and earth, says Jesus, shall pass away, but His Church, which is built on Him and His saving Gospel, shall never pass away. Notwithstanding all the furious storms and roaring waves of the turbulent waters of this world, the Ark of God will not sink, but it will finally reach the peaceful summit of Ararat on the other side in perfect safety.

But woe, my beloved friends, woe to all who are not in the Ark of God! Woe to all who built themselves a canoe, and by paddling their canoe, expect to reach the heavenly shores, for they will be sorely disappointed! Woe to all who enter the man-made arks of the modern theologians and liberal Christians, and expect to reach the celestial Ararat, for they will sink into the deeps of eternal perdition! Woe also to all who are in the Ark of God, but permit themselves to be taken out of it by worldliness, for they shall drown themselves spiritually and be eternally lost! Therefore, beloved friends, if any of you have left the Ark of God, that is, the Holy Christian Church, or if you have been swept out of it by unbelief and worldliness, then do repent this day, and the Lord will take you into His Ark, as Noah took in those doves, which came back, and you will finally reach the heavenly shores in safety, for the Ark of God will never sink; it will finally arrive on the summit of the heavenly Ararat.

Yea, most beloved friends, let all of us cling to our one and only Savior Jesus Christ by true faith, and let us willingly and very cheerfully serve Him, because He is so good! If we shall do it by the grace of God, then shall we be eternally saved, for Jesus Himself said: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3, 16.

And, in conclusion, my dear fellow-Christians, if we would be and remain in the Ark of God, in the Holy Christian Church, and finally reach the heavenly shores in safety, then we must diligently use the means of grace, which are the Word of God and the Holy Sacraments. By these means God Himself strengthens and preserves us steadfast in the true faith unto our end. Diligently hear and read God's Word, and frequently approach the Table of the Lord for your spiritual and eternal welfare. So help you God for the sake of Jesus Christ! Amen.

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany.

Matt. 18, 15—20.

Moreover, if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone; if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church. But if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them.

In this Sunday's Gospel-lesson Jesus speaks by a parable. He says that a man sowed good seed (wheat) in his field, but while he slept, his enemy came, and sowed tares among the wheat. After some days the wheat as well as the tares came forth out of the ground. When the blades began to bear fruit, the servants noticed the tares among the wheat. They came to their lord, and asked him: "Sir, didst thou not sow good seed in thy field? From whence then hath it tares?" Their lord answered: "An enemy hath done this." His servants asked Him: "Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?" But he said unto them: "Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest; and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them; but gather the wheat into my barn."

This parable of our dear Lord always has been misinterpreted by the opponents of Christian church-discipline. Many aver that excommunication from a Christian congregation is here forbidden by Jesus. They say, that the Lord teaches by this parable that a Christian congregation should not excommunicate any one of its members; that every member is responsible to God only, and that He will punish in due time; that He does not hold a Christian congregation responsible for the unchristian deeds of its members, even though they are manifest to the whole community. My dear friends, it is very hard to understand how any man can interpret this parable of the Lord Jesus so falsely!

There is no excuse for any one to do that. It will not do to say, "It is not such an easy task to interpret the parables of Jesus, as some of them are so difficult to interpret correctly," for this parable the Lord Himself interpreted. He does not say that the field is the church or congregation; no, He says that the field is the world. By this parable He teaches that in this world there are two kinds of people: Christians and non-Christians, children of God, and children of the devil. And He forbids the church or congregation to put the non-Christians out of this world, that is, He forbids the killing of them. That is what some church-denominations have often done. It is a wellknown fact that Romanists and Calvinists have killed those whom they considered heretics. The Lord Jesus tells all Christians in this parable, "Do not take the life of any man on account of his heresy." The Lord did not give the sword, but *His Word* to the Church. Whatever the Church cannot accomplish by His Word, she must leave undone. If people deserve to die on account of their wickedness and crimes, then, beloved friends, the civil government should execute capital punishment upon such evildoers, for the civil government received the sword from the Lord to execute wrath upon evildoers (Rom. 13, 1—4). What Christian congregations should do with them Jesus tells us in our text, namely, they should *excommunicate* them, if they will not truly repent and amend. To this important truth I shall now call your devout attention. The subject for our present contemplation shall therefore be:

The Excommunication from a Christian Congregation.

Let me show,

1. *What, ordinarily, should precede excommunication, and*
2. *How Christians should look upon an excommunicated person.*

1.

According to God's Word only such members should be excommunicated from a Christian congregation who are manifestly impenitent. Hypocrites, of course, are impenitent sinners, but as long as they are not known as such, they cannot be excommunicated. Therefore Jesus says in our text: "If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone; if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more,

that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church (congregation); but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican."

From these words of Jesus it is evident that certain steps must be taken before a member of a Christian congregation can be excommunicated. These steps we call *steps of brotherly admonition*.

If a fellow-Christian sins against you, my beloved friend, then you must "tell him his fault between thee and him alone." That must be the first step. When Jesus says that, if your brother [or sister], that is, your fellow-Christian, fellow-churchmember, sins against *you*, you should tell him his fault. He does not only mean to say that, if he commits a personal offense against you, but also, if you have first-hand knowledge of his sin, you should go and tell him his fault (sin). It must be a *sin*, not merely a *personal peculiarity* of the brother on account of which you must admonish him. You must not do, what so many do in such a case. What, then, do so many do, when they see their brother sin? They go and tell other people about it. That is a great sin, if you do that. If you do that, you sin against the clear commandment of the Savior in our text, for He says: "*If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone; if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.*" The object of your brotherly admonition must be to gain the erring brother; to reclaim him for His dear Savior and His Church. You must therefore speak to him of his sin in all seriousness, but also with loving kindness; you must talk to him like a real Christian brother, and show him from the Word of God, how he has offended against the holy and righteous God, and do all within your power to convince him of his sin, so that he may realize that he deserves nothing but God's displeasure, temporal death, and eternal damnation on account of his sin. In short, you must show by your whole conversation that you dearly *love him*, but that you *hate his sin* with all your heart. Perhaps your first attempt to gain him will prove futile, then try again, and keep on in your endeavors as long as you have the least hope of gaining him. If you are finally successful by the grace and assistance of God, that is, if you gain your erring brother, then thank God, but tell no one of his sin.

But, of course, it may also happen that the erring brother

will not listen to your Christian and brotherly admonitions and entreaties; yea, he may even abuse you for your efforts. What then? Then you must not think and say that you have done all that can be required of you or all that you can do; no, then you must go a step further. What step must you then take? The dear Savior gives the answer to this question in our text, when He says: "*But if He will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.*"

With these words Jesus tells you that, if you have admonished your brother who has grievously sinned and, perhaps, have done it repeatedly, yet without success, then you should go and take one or two of your fellow-Christians with you, and go to the sinning brother again, and admonish him in all kindness and seriousness. And those you have taken with you as your assistants, should not only be witnesses of what you and the sinning brother may say, but they, too, should admonish the erring brother, so that he may become aware of his guilt before God and repent. They should also admonish him as a brother, and do it as long as there is any hope of gaining the erring brother. Many an erring brother has been gained in such a way. If the brother has been gained, that is, if he repents and promises to amend, then you and your assistants should thank God, but tell no one of his sin.

But if all efforts are in vain, my beloved friend, what then? What step must then be taken by you and your assistants? This question our dear Savior also answers in our text, when He says: "*And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church.*" By the word *church* Jesus understands the Christian *congregation* to which the offending brother belongs. The congregation shall then do all it can to gain the brother, that is, to reclaim him for the dear Savior and His Church. The congregation must then invite the erring brother to appear before it. And when Jesus says that the congregation shall admonish the offending brother, He means to say, that not only the pastor, but also other members of the congregation shall do all they can to convince the brother of his sin and have him repent. If it were the will of the Lord Jesus that the pastor only should admonish the erring brother, then, my beloved friends, He would have said, "Tell it unto the pastor." It is a pity that in cases of Christian church-discipline the members as a rule are silent, perhaps for selfish

reasons, because they are afraid of losing a good customer or a friend. They are surely not doing what Jesus wants them to do; they sin against the Lord, against His Church, against the congregation, and against the offending brother. By keeping silent, they only encourage the offending brother to continue in his sin, and his blood will be required of them by the Lord on the day of the Final Judgment. Woe, therefore, to all church members, who will not do what Jesus wants them to do; who, by their carelessness towards the offending brother, become guilty of his damnation! Woe unto all members of a congregation, who hinder true Christian church-discipline, for they are partakers of other men's sins (1 Tim. 5, 22), and for this very reason they lose their own soul! If the members of a Christian congregation would always do what Jesus wants them to do, then, my beloved friends, many an offending member might be led to realize his sin, and his immortal soul would be eternally saved.

These are the steps of brotherly admonition which must be taken, if the sin of the brother is not manifest from its very beginning. It is different, however, if a brother's sin is known to all. If anyone sins openly, or if his sin is known to the whole congregation or community, then the offending one should be invited at once by the congregation (1 Tim. 5, 20; Gal. 2, 11—14), and the congregation should admonish him and do all it possibly can do that the offending brother [or sister] repent and amend. If the offending one truly repents and promises to amend, the whole congregation must forgive and forget the offense, for God Himself forgives the sins of the truly penitent sinners, and all members should rejoice with the holy angels over the repentance of the offending brother (Luke 15, 10).

But what should be done, if the offending brother will neither repent nor amend? What must be done, if he despises all brotherly admonitions and entreaties of his fellow-churchmembers? This question Jesus also answers in our text. He tells us that such a manifest impenitent sinner must be excommunicated from the Christian congregation. And if this has been done, what then? How should all members of the congregation look upon such an excommunicated person? This important question I shall now answer in the second place.

2.

The dear Savior says in our text: "*But if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.*"

We all know what the heathen are. The heathen are those who are without God and without hope in this world; they are lost and condemned sinners as long as they remain what they are; they cannot be eternally saved, unless they become converted, that is, true believers in Jesus Christ, the one and only Savior of mankind. And we also know what the publicans were in the days of Jesus. They were wilful and stubborn sinners, that is, men who cared not at all whether or not they sinned. They also had to repent and amend before they could become true Christians and eternally saved. As an heathen man and a publican, so Jesus says in our text, *he* should be regarded who has been rightfully excommunicated from a Christian congregation, that is, if he has been excommunicated from the Christian congregation according to Christ's instructions, for Jesus expressly says: "*Let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.*" All members of a Christian congregation must look upon such an excommunicated person as one who is outside of Christendom; who has forfeited all privileges of a member of a Christian congregation.

But is that not acting against Christian love? That is what all opponents of Christian church-discipline assert. But, my beloved friends, they are very much mistaken, for that is what God wants all Christians to do. By the mouth and pen of His holy Apostle Paul He says unto every Christian congregation: "Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person," that is the manifest impenitent sinner; excommunicate, expel him from the congregation, and look upon him as an heathen man and a publican. We must do what God wants us to do, and not what the opponents of Christian church-discipline want us to do.

And why does God want a Christian congregation to excommunicate or expel a manifest impenitent sinner from the congregation? The answer is, Because He Himself has excluded such a person from His Church, from the Holy Christian or Invisible Church, and He does not want an *impenitent* sinner to be a member of a visible church or congregation. If the members of the congregation look upon an excommunicated person as upon one who is outside of Christendom, who cannot be eternally saved until he repents and amends, they do the right thing, for Jesus

Himself says in our text: "*Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.*" Whenever a manifest impenitent sinner is excommunicated from the Christian congregation in accordance with Christ's instructions, then, beloved friends, such an excommunicated person is also excluded from heaven itself. The power to excommunicate, every local Christian congregation has received from God Himself, even if the same has not more than two or three members, for Jesus says in our text: "Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them." From these words of the dear Savior it is evident that even the smallest local congregation has the power to excommunicate a manifest impenitent sinner and, of course, also the power to reinstate him, if he truly repents and amends his sinful life.

If, therefore, a Christian congregation excommunicates a manifest impenitent sinner in conformance with the Lord's precept, then, my dear fellow-Christians, all its members should look upon such an excommunicated person as one outside of Christendom. And that all members of the congregation may do this, it is necessary, especially in large congregations, that such excommunication be announced from the pulpit by the pastor. Members of the congregation should not have intimate intercourse or fellowship with an excommunicated person as long as he does not repent and amend. That is what Jesus means when he says: "*Let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.*"

May God grant by His divine grace that all Christian congregations may at all times act according to the instructions of Jesus in our text, then, beloved friends, many an offending brother and sister will be saved. God grant this for the sake of Jesus Christ! Amen.

Sixth Sunday after Epiphany.

2 Pet. 1, 19—21.

We have also a more sure Word of Prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old times by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

In today's Gospel-lesson St. Matthew describes the most wonderful scene which ever was beheld by the eyes of mortal men in this world, for he says: "And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them; and His face did shine as the sun, and His raiment was white as the light. And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with Him. Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here; if Thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for Thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him. And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid. And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only."

In our text St. Peter refers to this wonderful scene which they had witnessed on that high mountain, and he says: "*We also have a more sure Word of Prophecy.*"

These are, indeed, most remarkable words. What does St. Peter wish to tell his fellow-Christians to whom he addressed his Second Epistle? Does he mean to tell them, that the voice of God the Father out of the bright cloud on the mount of transfiguration, was not as sure as the Word of Prophecy, that is, the Old Testament Scriptures? This is what some people believe; but that is not at all the case, for *every* word that proceeds out of the mouth of God is always sure, absolutely sure. Peter could not have meant to say that the words of the Father. "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him," spoken by Him out of the bright cloud, were not as certain and sure as the Word of Prophecy, the Old Testament Scriptures. No; Peter wanted to say this: The words spoken by the Father on the high

mount of transfiguration make us quite sure that the Word of Prophecy, the word, which God spoke by the mouth and pen of His holy prophets is absolutely sure and certain; we are persuaded that every word which the prophets of old have spoken will be fulfilled in due time; Jesus of Nazareth is in deed and in truth that Messiah who was to come, and all prophecies concerning Him will be literally fulfilled. And Peter was correct, as we see from the Word of Fulfilment, that is, the New Testament Scriptures. There cannot, therefore, be the least doubt in the mind of any true Christian, and any man who really reads and studies the whole Bible, that it is the Word of God from beginning to end. If you look at the sun, my beloved friend, you know that that wonderful light of the physical world could not have been made by men. Even every believer in Evolution, if he be honest, will admit that an intelligent Being must have created the sun. And if any honest person will read and study the whole Bible, he will at once perceive that it cannot be the product of men, because men could not have revealed what the Bible reveals. You and I, my beloved fellow-Christians, therefore need not be ashamed to openly confess that the Bible is the Word of God. Why not? This important question I shall now answer in accordance with our text and by the assistance of the Holy Spirit.

Why Can We Be Sure That the Bible is the Word of God?

I answer,

1. *Because it came from God,*
2. *Because it draws men to God.*

1.

What is the Bible? To this question our Catechism gives this answer: "It is the Word of God, written by inspiration of the Holy Ghost, by the holy prophets in the Old Testament, and by the apostles and evangelists in the New Testament, to make us wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." With these words our Catechism avers that the *Bible came from God*. Thus it is. The Bible does not merely *contain* words of God, but it *is* the Word of God. God, however, did not write the Bible Himself, but He had it written by men. Men were His penmen. For this very reason St. Peter says in our text: "*Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.*" He wishes to say that the writers of the Bible did not write their own thoughts and opinions, but that they wrote what God told them to write. They

were inspired by the Holy Ghost. Therefore David said: "My tongue is the pen of a ready Writer." Ps. 45, 1. Even the *words* themselves were inspired by the Holy Ghost, for St. Paul writes: "Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the *Holy Ghost teacheth*." 1 Cor. 2, 13. The whole Bible is the Word of God. Therefore Jesus Himself said: "Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the Law." Matt. 5, 18. Yes, the Bible is the Word of God from beginning to end.

This fact is being denied by all unbelievers, yea, even by many so-called Christians. The Modernists in so-called Christian pulpits do not believe that the Bible is the Word of God. But these would-be wise fellows have never proved to this day, nor will they ever be able to prove their contention, that the Bible is not the Word of the veracious God. The trouble with these fellows is that they never studied the Bible. They do not even know the difference between the Law and the Gospel. They are wise only in their own estimation. If they would only read and study the Bible, not to find fault with it, but to find the truth, they would at once have to admit, what all honest Bible readers have admitted at all times, viz., that the Bible *must* be God's Word, as no mere man could have written it. Some one has truthfully said, "A child of five years might as well be supposed to have been the architect of Solomon's temple, as any uninspired man or set of men to have been the authors of the Bible." Sound reason cannot do otherwise, it must acquiesce in the statement of St. Peter in our text, when he says: "*Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation.*" The prophecies contained in the Bible have been already fulfilled with the exception of Christ's return at the end of this world in order to raise the dead and judge the world. Thousands of years spanned the time between the prophecies and their fulfilment. Every honest man must admit that the prophets could not have prophesied what they did, if they had not been inspired by the Holy Spirit. That this is true everyone will readily perceive if I give a few examples.

Almost 1,700 years before the birth of Jesus Christ the Patriarch Jacob died. On his death-bed, while he was blessing his sons, turning his face to Judah, he cried out: "Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise; thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies; thy father's children shall bow down before thee.

...The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto Him shall the gathering of people be." Gen. 49, 8. 10. With these words Jacob prophesied of the coming of the promised Messiah, whom the Lord God had promised unto him and his father Isaac, and his grandfather Abraham (Gen. 22, 18; 26, 4; 28, 14). He prophesied that Shiloh should come when the scepter had been taken from Judah. And thus it happened. When Shiloh, the Messiah, became a true man, being born of the Virgin Mary, the scepter had been taken away from Judah, for the Jews were then subject to the Romans. I ask you, my beloved friends, could Jacob have made such predictions, if the Holy Spirit, who knows the future, would not have inspired him? Only a fool could aver this.

Again, about 1,000 years before the birth of Jesus Christ David, the great Jewish king, received this promise by the mouth of the Prophet Nathan: "And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy Seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish His kingdom. He shall build an house for My name, and I will establish the throne of His kingdom forever." 2 Sam. 7, 12. 13. Which of David's descendants established an everlasting kingdom? Solomon? By no means, for after Solomon's death his kingdom was divided. And where is his kingdom today? The descendant of David who established an everlasting kingdom is none other than Jesus Christ, the true Messiah. His kingdom is eternal. All earthly kingdoms will cease, but the kingdom of Jesus Christ will remain forever and ever. Now I ask, Could the Prophet Nathan have made such a prophecy without divine inspiration? Indeed not. And every sensible man will admit this to be an undeniable fact.

Again, about 750 years before the birth of Jesus Christ by the Virgin Mary the great Prophet Isaiah had made this prophecy: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel," that is, God with us (7. 14); and, again Isaiah prophesied of the sufferings and death of Messiah, describing every detail so accurately, as though he had been an eye-witness of Christ's sufferings and death on Calvary. Read the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah and you must admit that Isaiah was as accurate in describing the sufferings and death of Jesus as the holy evangelists were who lived in the time of fulfilment, and saw all with their own eyes. Every upright man must admit that

Isaiah could not have made such prophecies without divine inspiration. Only God, who knows all things, could do what Isaiah did: Predict Messiah's sufferings and death so accurately.

Again, the Prophet Micha, a contemporary of Isaiah, prophesied where the Messiah should be born. He cried out: "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall come forth unto Me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." (5. 2). Thus it happened, for Jesus was born at Bethlehem. Could Micha have foretold this event 750 years before it took place, if he had not been inspired by the Holy Spirit? Only a fool could make such an assertion.

Again, the great Prophet Daniel prophesied over 500 years before the birth of Jesus Christ that, from the time the decree went forth that Jerusalem should be rebuilt to the anointing of the Most Holy, (Messiah), there should be seventy weeks (shabuas), or 490 years.* And thus it was. How could Daniel have prophesied this, if he had not been inspired by the Holy Ghost? Of himself he knew the future as little as we do.

And, finally, to quote one more prophecy. Let me call your attention to a prophecy of the Prophet Isaiah in regard to Babylon, once the great metropolis of the Chaldees! In his thirteenth chapter he writes: "And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation; neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there; neither shall the shepherds make their fold there. But wild beasts of the desert shall lie there; and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures; and owls shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there. And the wild beasts of the islands shall cry in their desolate houses, and dragons in their pleasant palaces." Go to the site, my beloved friends, where Babylon once stood, and you will see that this prophecy of the great Prophet Isaiah has been literally fulfilled.

I could easily multiply examples to show that the prophecies were all literally fulfilled, but time does not permit. The ones which I have quoted prove beyond any doubt to every candid and upright mind that *the Bible came from God*; that it is the Word of God from beginning to end.

* See sermon on Daniel 9, 24 in this volume.

8 Hart. Sermon.

But we can also be quite certain that the Bible is the Word of God, because it *draws men to God*. Of this I shall now speak to you in the second place.

2.

St. Peter writes his fellow-Christians in our text: "*We have also a more sure Word of Prophecy; wereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts.*"

People often refer to human reason as a light, and, in temporal, earthly things, it is a light. All the wonderful inventions made by men are proof for the fact that human reason is, indeed, a light in things that pertain to this present life. But in *spiritual* matters human reason is not a light at all. Whosoever follows his reason in spiritual matters will always grovel in spiritual darkness. All religions, except the Christian religion, which is founded upon the Bible, do not draw men to God and into heaven, but to the devil and into hell. Human reason, after the Fall, does not draw men to God. If God had not given His Word unto men, not one of them ever could have been eternally saved, for the Bible is the only book which teaches sinful men how they can come to God; it is the only book that draws men to God. Why? Because it is the only book which tells a sinner, who is terrified on account of his sins, and would like to become reconciled to a just and righteous God, how this is possible. The Bible, the Bible alone, teaches salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, the one and only Savior of sinners. The Bible, the Bible alone, teaches the saving Gospel.

What, then, is the Gospel? The Gospel is the glad tidings (news) of the grace of God in Christ Jesus. It tells sinners, that God so loved the world (all sinful men), that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3, 16).

The Gospel of Jesus Christ, contained in the Bible, draws sinful men to God. Permit me, beloved friends, to give you a few instances from many as they are being told by Christian missionaries in the Orient. I am quoting from a little tract, issued by the American Bible Society.

"Kenkichi Kataoka was in prison. A missionary gave him a New Testament. He read and studied it, and believed. Years after a Speaker of the House, he opened each session with silent prayer.

He was wont to invite the ten or fifteen Christian members to his home for conference. His influence had a profound effect. Later he was elected president of Doshisha University.

"Ryoun Kumagui, a Buddhist scholar,...said, 'By degrees as I went on reading the Bible, I understood that the teaching of Christ is not only not inferior to any other religion, but that it is so far above them that they cannot be compared to it. Christianity includes everything good to be found in Shin Shu, Nichiren Shu, and Zen Shu (Buddhist orders), and is higher than all. I am not making light of Buddhism; but I believe that its purpose is realized best in Christianity. After the sun has risen, it is not necessary to go on burning electric lights.'

"Mr. Yung Tao, the commissioner of the Department of Native Industries in Peking, purchased 5,000 New Testaments to give to friends....He said, he sees in the Bible the only hope for the Chinese nation; that in the Bible both, officials and people, can find the way to truth and rectitude, and that it cannot be found any other way.

"Viscount Shibusawa, Japan's multimillionaire philanthropist, says concerning the Bible: 'One was given to me years ago, and I have read some of it nearly every day since. It is the greatest book ever written. I wish there was a copy in every home in Japan.'" Examples, my beloved friends, could be multiplied, but these may suffice.

The Bible has now been translated into over 775 different languages and dialects. More Bibles are bought than any other book. Wherever people read and study the Bible they are being drawn to God. St. Peter spoke the truth when he said in our text, that the Word of God when it shines into the hearts and minds of men, converts them to God; that it saves their immortal souls. The Day Star, that is, the Savior of the world, to whom the Bible draws sinful men, is Jesus. What He said to the Jews in His day, holds good to this very day. He said unto them: "Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of Me." John 5, 39.

What, then, beloved fellow-Christians, is our duty? It is our duty to do all we possibly can do, that the Bible may be brought to those that have it not. The Bible, being the Word of God, can save and it does save all those who really study and believe it. It converts them from sin and service of sin to God and the service of Him, who came to seek and save that which was lost

(Matt. 18, 11). Oh, that all of us would daily read and study the Bible,* so that we may learn to know our sins and the grace of God in Christ Jesus, and, believing in our dear Savior, let our light (faith) shine before all men that they may see our good works, and glorify our Father which is in heaven (Matt. 5, 16). So help us God for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

* "This one book (Bible) will live when the remembrance of all other books is passed away. It will go down through the successive generations of men; and when the earth shall be burnt up, and the havens shall pass away with a great noise, it shall remain inscribed on the hearts of an exceeding great multitude, which no man can number. It shall go up to the bar of God, shall enter into the gates of the heavenly city, and there be hailed as the charter of its immortal joys. Precious, precious, thrice precious Book of God! It can cheer when every other comforter is far away. It can visit the chambers of solitude, and counsel and comfort on the bed of languishing. It holds up the torch-light of heaven's tenderest mercy in the midst of the dark valley; it is the comforter of the otherwise comfortless, wiping away the tear that trembles in the eye which fixes its last look on things below. Who that does not deliberately purpose to live without God and without hope, that is not prepared to seal the warrant that consigns him to hopeless death and an undone eternity, can live in the allowed neglect of the Holy Scriptures? 'Hear ye, and give ear; be not proud, for the Lord hath spoken.' That man shall not lose his reward, who is a diligent and humble student of God's Word. We do earnestly invite the sons and daughters of men to this rich field of thought. We bid them rove over it from flower to flower, and we bid them dig for its hidden treasures. It has running streams, and sparkling fountains, and deep wells, at which he who drinks shall find living water....O ye, who are fallen by your iniquity, and to whom this wondrous redemption is revealed and offered in the Bible—ye, who are so insensibly and rapidly borne on the broad and rapid torrent of time to that eternity, where friends of this Bible and this Savior will encircle the throne, and where the enemies of this Bible and this Savior will have lost a throne, never to be regained; is it to that blissful presence that you are bending your course? or to that mournful exile? That eternity is at no great distance; you stand upon its brink: it is but a little moment and you pass into it. Time is too short, life too precious, to disregard the counsels of this Bible, to trifle with this eternity and this salvation. O perverse, O senseless world! that can be blinded thus, and thus infatuate, while all below is vanishing like a shadow, and there is yet an eternity to lose, or an eternity to gain!"—Dr. G. Spring, *Bible not of Man*, pp. 309—311.

Septuagesima Sunday.

Matt. 25, 14—30.

For the kingdom of heaven is as a man traveling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey. Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two. But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money. After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them. And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents; behold, I have gained beside them five talents more. His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy lord. He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents; behold, I have gained two other talents beside them. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy lord. Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strewed; and I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth. Lo, there thou hast that is thine. His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strewed. Thou oughtest, therefore, to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance; but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

In this text the dear Savior speaks by a parable. He says that a man was about to take a journey into a far country. Before he left, he turned over his goods to his servants, and enjoined them to use them to his own personal advantage. He did not give the same portion of goods or the same number of talents* to every servant; no, he gave to each one according to his trading

* A talent was worth about \$1,200.00.

ability. He did not expect his servants to do anything they were unable to do. To one he entrusted five talents; to another two; and to still another only one. After he had delivered his talents to every one of his servants, he left for a far country. He did not reveal to them the time of his return.

What the servants did, Jesus tells us in the parable. Two of them did all they possibly could do to increase their master's goods. But one of them, being very slothful, went and hid the talent in the ground. The two good and faithful servants doubled their master's talents, while the slothful servant gained nothing whatever for his lord. His good and faithful servants the lord rewarded very abundantly, but his slothful and wicked servant he dismissed from his service and gave orders that he should be punished.

Whenever Jesus spoke by parables, He always wished to teach some very important spiritual truths. That is what He wished to do also by the parable in our text. Some one has well said, "A parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning." By this parable Jesus wishes to teach that in His kingdom on earth, that is, in outer Christendom, there are two kinds of servants. By the assistance of the Holy Spirit let me now call your attention to:

Two Kinds of Servants in the Lord's Kingdom Here on Earth.
Some are,

1. *Good and faithful servants;*
2. *Slothful and wicked servants.*

1.

Jesus begins the parable in our text, saying: "For the kingdom of heaven is as a man traveling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey."

The man, spoken of in these words, is Jesus Himself. The servants are all those people who belong to some Christian congregation; all church-members. When Jesus had finished His work of redemption, He for forty days remained here on earth, and at divers times He appeared unto His disciples. The Bible tells us of ten such appearances to His disciples between the

time of His resurrection and ascension. On the fortieth day after His glorious resurrection He assembled His disciples about Him on the Mount of Olives, near the city of Jerusalem. There He gave them His last instructions and commandments, and then He did what He often had told them that He would do: He ascended into heaven; withdrew from them His visible presence. Even before His death He had told them repeatedly that He would come again on the Day of Judgment. And on the day of His ascension two angels appeared unto His disciples and said unto them: "This same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven." Acts 1, 11. But neither the angels nor Jesus Himself had revealed unto them the time of His return. When Jesus ascended into heaven He turned over the affairs of His Church to His disciples, and He enjoined them to work for Him in His kingdom here on earth, and to do it faithfully and cheerfully. His disciples were the representatives of all His followers unto the end of this world. What He told them, is also told unto all Christians for all times and in all places, because all those who call themselves Christians, all church-members, should do all they possibly can do for the dear Savior and His Church.

The rich man in the parable before us for our contemplation gave unto one of his servants five talents, to another two, and to still another but one. His instructions to all of them were that they should use the talents entrusted to them in such a way that his own wealth might be increased; they should not look to their own enrichment, but rather to his enrichment; they should not serve themselves, but him, their lord and master.

Jesus also has entrusted to His servants various gifts which He wants them to use for the expansion of His Church. He has given to them both spiritual and material gifts for this very purpose. Some have received many, some only a few, but all have received some gifts from Him. He gives them according to their several ability. To all His followers He has entrusted the means of grace, that is, His Word and the blessed Sacraments; but while some are rich in spiritual knowledge, others have only a small portion of spiritual wisdom. Some He has endowed with the gift to impart their knowledge to others by mouth and pen, while others lack this gift, but they have received the gift to readily discern Gospel-truth from false doctrine. To still others He has given the gift of strong faith, or the gift of fervent

prayer, or the gift of fortitude and resignation to His will in all kinds of adversities.

Aside from these spiritual gifts He has also blessed many with material gifts: great riches in temporal things, and wealth in useful knowledge and honors. It is the will of the Lord Jesus that all of His servants should use their several gifts in such a manner that His glory may be enhanced, and His kingdom be expanded among all nations of this world. He dearly loves all people, and He wants them all to be eternally saved. That is the reason why He commissioned His disciples to go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to all sinful men. When He said unto them: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you," He wanted them to do all they possibly could do for Him and His Church. He wanted them all to be good and faithful servants in His kingdom here on earth.

In the parable in our text He tells us that two of the servants were good and faithful servants, for they doubled their lord's talents. They worked and labored with determination. They never for a moment thought of being at leisure. No; they were as busy as they possibly could be to increase their lord's possessions. They considered it quite an honor that their master had entrusted the talents unto them; that he believed them to be good and faithful servants. They would not disappoint such a good and considerate master for anything in this world, because they loved him with all their heart.

That is the spirit which Jesus looks for in His servants also. He wants them to be good and faithful servants, who serve Him cheerfully, because they love Him so much. He always has been so good and kind unto them, and He expects them to show their gratitude unto Him by willing and cheerful service, and by service well performed. Yes, Jesus wants good and faithful servants only. He does not expect all of them to do the same amount of work in His kingdom here upon earth, for He knows that they are not at all gifted alike, but He does want every one to do all that he can, according to his ability. Of him, whom He has given much, He will require much; and of him, whom He has given little, He will require less, but He looks for *faithfulness* in every one of them. He wants every Christian to be faithful in serving Him.

There always have been Christians who accomplished great things for the Lord Jesus and His Church while they were here on earth. The Bible as well as church-history tell us of many good and faithful servants of the Lord. They made good with the talents that were entrusted to them. Just think of the prophets of God during the time of the old dispensation! Great were their achievements for God's kingdom on this earth. The giants among them were Moses, Samuel, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremias and Daniel. Again, think of the holy apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ! Have they not accomplished great and wonderful things for Him and His Church? Simon Peter, James, and John were, indeed, the pillars of the early Christian churches. And what do we behold, if we look to St. Paul, the greatest of all the apostles? His achievements for the Christian Church were simply enormous in every respect. Many Christian churches were founded by him throughout all the Gentile nations. And if we look to the men in post-apostolic times, we again behold many good and faithful servants of the Lord. Athanasius, the defender of the Christian faith, and St. Augustine, the preserver of the true Christian doctrine of man's justification by faith in Christ Jesus, were men who accomplished great and far-reaching results for the Church of Jesus, the Christian Church. Yes, even in the dark Middle Ages, when the Pope had contaminated the sound doctrine of the Gospel with his poisonous tenets, there were men who even preached the Gospel in its purity. I call your attention to St. Boniface, the "Apostle of the Germans," and St. Ansgar, the "Apostle of the North." And were not John Hus and Savanorola men, who proclaimed the saving truth to thousands upon thousands of people? And what shall I say of Martin Luther? We cannot conceive what should have become of the Christian churches, if God had not raised up Luther. Look also to Martin Chemnitz, and John and Paul Gerhardt, and you will readily admit that they achieved great things for the Church of Christ. And in our own country, my beloved friends, there were men, who preached Christ and Him crucified to thousands upon thousands of poor sinners and thus proved themselves to be very efficient servants of the dear Lord. Let me simply mention such preachers as Muchlenberg, Walther, Wyneken, Craemer, Graebner, and, outside of our denomination, Moody. All these servants of the Lord and many others doubled the talents of their

Lord which He had entrusted to them. They worked most faithfully and cheerfully for Him and His blessed kingdom.

But, beloved friends, there were many other Christians, who were not preachers of the Gospel, and yet they accomplished great things for the Lord and His Church! These were Christian men, who, though they could not go out to preach the Gospel with their own tongues, nevertheless preached it through others, because they cheerfully contributed of their earthly possessions for the spreading of God's kingdom. They gave their money and jewels for Christian missions; they grew not weary in well-doing; they consecrated their hearts and possessions, their gold and silver to the service of the Master.

And, finally, we must not overlook the poor and unlettered Christians, who served the Lord in all singleness of heart as well as they could do by performing the duties of their temporal calling cheerfully and faithfully, not with eye-service, as men-pleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart (Ephesians 6, 6).

Yes, indeed, at all times there have been Christian men and women who served the Lord most faithfully. Many and divers obstacles met them in their path of service, but they overcame them by the assistance and grace of Him, who entrusted His talents unto them, and they pushed forward with keen determination, and finally they met their good and faithful Lord at the threshold of eternity, and He welcomed them, each one of them, with these words of commendation: "*Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.*" O the great blessedness of all good and faithful servants of the Lord Jesus Christ!

But, sad to say, my beloved friends, not all church-members are good and faithful servants of the Lord: no, there are also many unprofitable and slothful servants in His kingdom here on earth, that is, in outer Christendom. Not all are what they profess themselves to be. And of this fact I shall now speak to you in the second place.

2.

When the rich man in our parable returned from the far country, he had a conference with his servants. He wanted to find out how they had used the talents, which he had entrusted unto them. The good and faithful servants joyfully made report

of their success, and he rewarded them very nobly. The one servant, however, had not gained anything for his master. Listen, what he says unto his lord: "Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strewed; and I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth. Lo, there thou hast that is thine." This servant was a slothful and unprofitable servant. The reason was, because he loved not his master, nor did he care for his master's welfare. He looked out for himself only. His own business was so important and pressing that he had no time to bother himself about his master's talent. He had acted the hypocrite to his master all the while; he was indeed a very wicked servant.

This wicked and slothful servant has many fellows among those who call themselves Christians, — among the church-members. Yes, it is a sad fact that many of those who call themselves Christians, and who wish to be considered good Christians, are nothing but downright hypocrites. They have no love for the Savior, who loved them unto death, even unto the horrible death on the cross. They have joined the church or congregation for selfish reasons. They are only looking for the advancement of their own temporal welfare. Whenever a congregation is about to let some contracts for some buildings, or if any work for the congregation is to be done which promises a material gain, then these hypocrites are very alert; then they are not at all slothful. No, they are bound to get "that job" by all means, for "there's money in it," and they are after money. If they do not get the coveted "job" they become very sullen, and they no longer show any interest in the affairs of the congregation. Yes, they have joined the church for temporal gains, and if these cannot be gotten, they have "lost all interest in church affairs." If they do not actually leave the congregation, they at least will not support it according to their ability. Yes, it is true what some one has said of them, "They belong to those small souls who never rise above the dirt." Poor, self-deceived people that they are! They labor only for the things which perish.

What will Jesus do with such slothful and wicked servants? Unless they truly repent, He will do with them what the lord in our parable did with his slothful and wicked servant: Jesus will punish them. He will not only take from them all they have in the hour of their death, but He will cast them out into outer darkness, that is, He will cast them into hell. It will not save

anybody, if he simply belongs to some church; no, if he at the same time is not a true Christian, a true believer in Jesus Christ, and if he does not prove his faith in Jesus Christ by good and faithful service, by good works, he will be looked upon by the Savior as a slothful and wicked servant,—a sham-Christian, a hypocrite, and he will be eternally lost. A faith which does not produce good works, is indeed dead, and a dead faith cannot save. My beloved fellow-Christians, do not forget that true, saving faith manifests itself by good and faithful service to the Lord Jesus Christ.

How is it with you? How are you using the talents which your Savior has entrusted to you? Are you using them for the advancement of your own selfish ends, or do you belong to those who are wisely improving their great spiritual opportunities? Are you after the things which perish, or are you after the salvation of your immortal soul? Do you really love Jesus, who died for you that you might live, and are you serving Him cheerfully and faithfully with might and main? Or, my friend, are you only serving yourself? Are you a good and faithful servant, or a slothful and wicked servant of the Lord Jesus? My dear friend, all of these questions you must answer sooner or later. Do not deceive yourself! Examine yourself, whether you are a slothful and wicked or a good and faithful servant of the Lord Jesus Christ! Woe unto you, if you are an unprofitable servant of the Savior, for if that be the case, you cannot be eternally saved. But blessed are you, if you are a good and faithful servant, for then will you hear this blessed welcome out of the mouth of Jesus when you must leave this world: *"Well done, thou good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."* O the blessedness of all true Christians, of all good and faithful servants of the Lord Jesus Christ! Oh, that every one of us might be such a one! Let every one of us daily pray with all his heart,

Give me a faithful heart,
Likeness to Thee,
That each departing day
Henceforth may see
Some work of love begun,
Some deed of kindness done,
Some wand'rer sought and won,
Something for Thee.

All that I am and have —
Thy gifts so free —
In joy, in grief, through life,
Dear Lord, for Thee!
And when Thy face I see,
My ransomed soul shall be,
Through all eternity,
Something for Thee. Amen.

Sexagesima Sunday.

John 8, 31. 32.

Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on Him, If ye continue in My Word, then are ye My disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

In the Gospel-lesson of this Sunday we have the dear Savior's Parable of the Sower. In it Jesus tells us that a "sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell by the wayside; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it. And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it and choked it. And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundredfold." His disciples, however, did not understand this parable, and they asked Him, saying: "What might this parable be?" Jesus explained it, saying: "Now the parable is this: The seed is the Word of God. Those by the wayside are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the Word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. They on the rock are they which, when they hear, receive the Word with joy; and these have not root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away. And that which fell among thorns are they which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection. But that on the good ground are they which in an honest and good heart, having heard the Word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience."

From this parable and its explanation we see there are quite many people who at once believe the preached Word of God, but they believe it only for a while. Even though they have received the Gospel-message with great joy they, nevertheless, soon fall away from the true faith which was engendered in their hearts by the saving Gospel. Why do they fall away? Some fall away on account of temptations which come upon them. When they are made to suffer on account of their faith, or when worldlings ridicule them on account of their Christian faith, they become lukewarm and finally they side with the unbelievers and worldlings. Others fall away because the cares, riches, and pleasures of this world take possession of their hearts and drive out the true faith. Comparatively a few only receive the Word with a

believing heart and remain to be true Christians unto their end. That this is true, we see from our text. When Jesus had declared the Gospel to a lot of Jews, many believed on Him, the evangelist tells us, that is, they firmly believed that He must be the promised Messiah. But, of course, the dear Savior knew very well that many of them would not remain steadfast in this faith, if they came into contact with the unbelieving Pharisees, and therefore He spoke unto them the words, which are recorded in our text. He wished to encourage all those Jews who had embraced Him as the promised Messiah, to remain true and steadfast in their faith, and for this very reason He said unto them: *"If ye continue in My Word, then are ye My disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."* To these words of our blessed Savior I now wish to call your devout attention. By the assistance of the Holy Spirit and in accordance with our text let me, then, answer the important question:

What Does Jesus Say of Those Who Continue in His Word?

He says,

1. *That they shall be His disciples indeed.*
2. *That they shall know the truth.*
3. *That the truth shall make them free.*

1.

By nature no man is, nor can he be, a disciple of Jesus Christ. By nature, as the Bible everywhere testifies, all men are without Christ, and, therefore, without hope, because they are spiritually depraved and as an unclean thing in the sight of God. This depraved state of man in which he finds himself by nature, we call original sin. Original sin, like a poison, has permeated our whole human nature, and therefore we are all children of wrath, being under the curse and condemnation of God's holy Law, estranged and separated from God. And from this corrupt source daily issue forth many actual sins in thoughts, words, and deeds. This is the true condition of man as he is by nature. To every candid mind it is evident that man, as he is by nature, is not, yea, cannot be, a disciple of Jesus Christ. A depraved man cannot rise above his depraved nature, as every one must readily admit. Job rightly says: "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?" and he himself gives the correct answer, saying, "Not one."²

But, my beloved friends, where the natural power of man is powerless, the grace of God is powerful. We became Christians, not by a natural process of evolution, as the non-Christian scientists and the Higher Critics would make us believe, but by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ. God, in His loving kindness and divine compassion, brought us into contact with the means of grace, that is, with His holy Word and Sacraments, for the Holy Sacraments belong to the Gospel in the broader sense, and, therefore, our old Lutheran theologians rightly called the Sacraments the *visible Gospel*. The Holy Spirit operates through and by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Therefore St. Paul says of the Gospel that it is a power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth (Rom. 1, 16). The Gospel is a spiritual power or, as Jesus once said, it is spirit and life (John 6, 63), and therefore it gives spiritual life. The Gospel does not only offer spiritual life, but it *appropriates* it. The Gospel is not, as many say, a mere history of the life, deeds, sufferings, death, resurrection, and ascension of our dear Savior, but it is a real means of grace, appropriating unto believers forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation. True faith comes by hearing and believing the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen Savior of the sinful and lost world.

But, beloved friends, it is not sufficient that we simply *accept* the Gospel-message and embrace Jesus Christ as our one and only Savior, no, we must also *continue in His Word* or Gospel, if we would be and remain His *true* disciples, for He Himself says in our text: "*If ye continue in My Word, then are ye My disciples indeed.*"

There are millions upon millions of people, who at one time really believed in Jesus Christ, but they continued not in His Word, and therefore their faith did not grow, but it rather became more feeble from day to day, and finally it withered away, — it died. Many believe for a while, and then they fall away. Why? Because they do not continue in the Word of Jesus. They grow tired of the Gospel and, therefore, they neglect to hear it diligently, and before they are aware of it, their faith has died, and a dead faith cannot save. Only those, who have a living faith unto their end, shall be eternally saved (Matt. 24, 13). No one can be and remain a true disciple of Jesus Christ, unless he continues in His Word. His Word is spiritual food, food for the soul, and if this food is withheld from a believing soul, it will,

yes, it must, starve spiritually. Spiritual starvation leads to spiritual death. The true reason for the sad fact that there are now in outer Christendom so many sham-Christians, is this, because they did not continue in the Word of Jesus Christ. Considering themselves wise, they become fools in the sight of God, and they will be eternally lost, unless they truly repent.

Beloved fellow-Christians, if we continue in the Word of Jesus, putting all our trust and confidence in it, then are we His true disciples indeed, not only by profession, but in reality. But he who continues not in the Word of Jesus and turns to the false teachings of men, or who doubts the Savior's Word, is not a true disciple of Jesus Christ, notwithstanding the fact that he professes himself a true Christian with his lips.

Those, who continue in Christ's Word, are not only His true disciples indeed, but they alone shall know the truth. Of this fact I shall now speak to you in the second place.

2.

To His true disciples Jesus says: "*And ye shall know the truth.*" That is a very plain, positive, and emphatic declaration. His disciples, says He, shall know the truth. What, then, is truth? Truth is that which is absolutely true. Christ, of course, is here speaking of *divine* truth. Christ's Word or the Gospel is absolute truth, for He is the very Son of God, and therefore He cannot lie. His doctrines are not invented by men; they are not composed of a certain set of human philosophies, such as, for example, false religions. Jesus did not found the Christian religion on any human calculations or hypotheses, as, for example, all false teachers have done, as we can see when we investigate Mohammedanism, or modern Judaism, or Unitarianism, or Mormonism, or Roman Catholicism, or Christian Scientism, or Russellism, or lodgeism, or so-called Higher Criticism. No, Jesus Christ advanced no human hypotheses and passed them off for divine truth. He proclaimed unto the sinner-world what He had heard and seen when He was in the bosom of His Father. Therefore, when Jesus speaks unto us in His Word, we hear not the voice of a mere man, but the voice of the Godman Savior of the world. His voice is the voice of God. For this very reason His Father spoke from heaven, saying of Jesus: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him." Whatever Jesus says is divine truth. If we believe what He says,

then, beloved friends, we believe divine truth. Whatsoever deviates from the Word of Jesus or the Gospel is not truth but falsehood.

It is true that in outer Christendom we can find many people who call themselves Christians, and who wish to be considered exemplary Christians, but who do not care for the truth in religious matters. It does not concern them whether or not they hold true or false, human or divine views concerning any particular doctrines of religion. They speak very emphatically in favor of toleration, which with them is nothing else than rank indifference for every clear and distinctive doctrine taught in the Bible. These indifferentists take no positive stand on any religious doctrine whatever. They say, that everybody will ultimately be saved, if he is only sincere in his belief. Now every candid and fair mind will readily admit that such a saying is rank foolishness, for if it were true what these people say, then, my beloved friends, there would have been no necessity at all for a Savior of sinners. These very people, though they call themselves Christians or disciples of Jesus Christ, are not His disciples at all. They are self-deceived errorists; they are in reality against Jesus Christ, for He said: "He that is not with Me is against Me."

True disciples of Jesus Christ cannot be advocates of such a deceptive and false union of God's eternal truth and man's error. The advocates of religious neutrality, the false unionists, attempt to unite and mix the most disharmonious and conflicting elements, or, failing in this effort, they simply ignore the great and vital differences which they cannot harmonize.

Christ's true disciples have the truth, for they have Him and His Word, which is truth. Jesus Christ being divine truth personified, His doctrine must be divine truth. The great fundamental truth of the Gospel, however, is the doctrine of justification by faith in Christ Jesus without the deeds of the Law (Rom. 3, 28).

Knowing the truth and being in full possession of the same, what, then, is our duty, my beloved fellow-Christians? I answer, in the first place, we should *love the truth*. It is so precious; it is such a priceless gift of God; such an inestimable divine treasure that, if we are Christ's disciples indeed, we cannot do otherwise but love it. In the second place, we should also *confess the truth before all men*. If we have the divine truth, and yet would

not be willing to confess it, we would be downright hypocrites, sham-Christians, such as there are so many in outer Christendom.

Our dear Savior, having declared in our text that they who continue in His Word are His disciples indeed, and having also affirmed that they shall know the truth, finally says of them that the truth shall make them free. And of this I shall now speak to you in the third place.

3.

People living in ignorance or error with respect to the Word of God are in a condition of spiritual slavery. The only liberator from spiritual slavery is divine truth, the Word of God or the Gospel of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The Word of God never loses its divine power or influence over sinful men; it does not grow weaker as time progresses. It is as powerful today as it was when Christ spoke it in the days of His sojourn here on earth. His saying in our text, "*The truth shall make you free,*" holds good to this very day. This word of Jesus is being verified before our very eyes every day. Divine truth never changes; it always remains the same. The liberating power of divine truth never gives way. It is not like unto the hypotheses and theories of human scientists. Scientists often change their minds concerning their theories. Right recently, for example, a great scientist (Einstein) came forth with the contention that the law of gravitation is wrong, and some of the greatest living scientists pronounced this theory correct, while a few years ago anyone making such assertions would have been pronounced irrational by all leading scientists of the world. Sciences, so-called, change whenever the views of scientists change. All this shows that what men call sciences, in many respects are only theories or hypotheses of scientists. It is not so, however, with divine truth. Divine truth never changes; it always remains the very same, just as God does not, and cannot, change, but always remains the very same. Divine truth has made men free in the past, it is making them free now, and it will make them free in the future.

Let me, my beloved friends, call your attention to some few examples of the power of divine truth to make men free from spiritual slavery! We behold the holy apostles of Jesus Christ and their immediate followers, — a company of few men in num-

ber, but mighty in true faith and love, without civil authority, despised and persecuted by their enemies, and yet, we see them overthrowing the idolatry, the falsehoods, the satanic delusions and errors and superstitions of Greece and Rome! The Greek and Roman philosophies crumbled before the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Again, beloved friends, look to the Reformation! When the whole world trembled under the despotism of the Pope, when souls and consciences of men were held in bondage by the Roman clergy, when, instead of God's Word, men were taught the opinions and commandments of men, then God called Martin Luther to the great work of the Reformation, that He, through His chosen vessel Luther, might make known again divine truth, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and thus free men from their spiritual bondage. Then it was that men, so long held in bondage and error, in falsehood and superstition, heard the truth and the truth made them free. They were freed from spiritual slavery.

There is but one remedy for the present upheaval in this world. And this one remedy is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It alone is able to make men free indeed, free from the sins which now are holding millions upon millions of men in spiritual bondage and servitude. If people will accept the old Gospel of Jesus Christ, and if they will discard the so-called new gospel of the Higher Critics or Modernists, they will become free, indeed, from error and superstition. If they, however, will not accept the Gospel of Jesus Christ as it is recorded in the Bible, then, beloved friends, they will die in their sins. There is no other way of becoming truly free from spiritual bondage. It is of great and vital importance for every one of us that he keep this fact in his mind. That we may do it, God grant for Jesus' sake! Amen.

Quinquagesima Sunday.

Revelation 2, 1—7.

Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write: These things saith He that holdeth the seven stars in His right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks: I know thy works, and thy labor, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil; and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles and are not, and hast found them liars; and hast borne, and hast patience, and for My name's sake hast labored, and hast not fainted. Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember, therefore, from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent. But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches: To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

This Sunday is called *Quinquagesima* Sunday. Why? Because it is the fiftieth day before Easter Sunday. *Quinquagesima* Sunday is the last one before the Lenten season, which begins with Ash Wednesday. The Lenten season, or more properly, the Passion season, lasts forty days.

Many church people hold to the erroneous opinion that during the Passion season Christians should abstain from eating meat, and that they should avoid all worldly, sinful amusements. But the Bible does not enjoin Christians to abstain from eating meat during the Lenten season (Col. 2, 16; 1 Tim. 4, 1. 2). The Bible, however, enjoins all believing Christians to avoid all sinful amusements at all times and not only during the time of Lent (Rom. 12, 2; 1 John 2, 15—17). Not only during a certain season, but during their whole lifetime Christians should be true Christians and show that they are true Christians by a truly Christian life. In itself the Lenten season differs not from any other time. This all Bible Christians know.

But, beloved friends, the Christian Church has, nevertheless, designated the forty days prior to Easter Sunday as a season in which Christians should especially meditate upon the bitter sufferings of Jesus Christ, and the real cause of His ignominious death upon the accursed tree of the cross. In our beloved Lutheran Church we hold special services, either on Wednesdays or

Fridays during the Passion season, in which the history of our dear Savior's Passion is read and contemplated. Whenever we hear of our Savior's sufferings and death, we are reminded of the real cause of them, of our sins, and transgressions, and are admonished to repent. It is, indeed, true that a true Christian lives in daily repentance, but the Passion season exhorts him especially unto true repentance, and therefore Christians always have regarded this season as a season of *penitence*. And as such a season we Lutherans also regard it.

During this year's season of Lent we shall meditate upon the Passion of our Savior in our mid-week Lenten services. On Sunday evenings, however, we shall contemplate the *Seven Letters of Jesus*, found in St. John's Book of Revelation. In these letters of our dear Savior we shall find much instruction and admonition that will lead us to a deeper understanding of our weaknesses and sins and move us to go to Jesus with penitent hearts, seeking His forgiveness and strength for our Christian faith. May the Lord bless these meditations according to His good and gracious will to everyone of us!

The first of Christ's Seven Letters was addressed to the Christian church or congregation in the city of *Ephesus*.* Let

* About 1100 B. C. the first Greek colonists, coming from Athens, expelled most of the older population and founded a joint city of Greeks and the native remnant beside the shrine of their own Athena, including in their city also a tract along the skirts of Koressos.

For four centuries this was the situation of Ephesus. In the Ephesian ceremonial the life of the bee was the model: the Great Goddess as the *queen-bee*, the mother of her people, and her image was in outline not unlike the bee, with a grotesque mixture of the human form: her priestesses were called *Melissai* (working bees), and a body of priests attached to the temple was called *Essenes* (the drones).

With the conquest of Asia by Alexander the Great, after 335 B. C., the Greek spirit began to strengthen itself in Ephesus and in general throughout the country. This is first perceptible in the coinage. The bee, the sacred insect and the symbol of the Great Goddess, had hitherto always been the principle type of Ephesian coins. Now about 295 B. C. a purely Greek type, the head of the Greek Artemis (Diana), was substituted for the bee on the silver coins, while the less honorable copper coinage retained the old hieratic types.

Ephesus soon became one of the greatest cities of Asia. Not only was Ephesus the greatest trading city of the Province Asia,

us, then, beloved friends, direct our devout attention to our Savior's letter to the church of Ephesus. The theme for our present discourse shall therefore be:—

Our Dear Savior's Letter Addressed to the Church at Ephesus.
Let me show,

1. *What He commends in this church,*
2. *With what He is much displeased, and*
3. *What He urgently demands of it.*

1.

We read in our text: "*Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write: These things saith He that holdeth the seven stars in His right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks: I know thy works, and thy labor, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil; and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles and are not, and hast found them liars; and hast borne, and hast patience, and for My name's sake hast labored, and hast fainted not.*"

The author of this letter to the church at Ephesus and the other six churches in Asia Minor is none other than Jesus, the

and also of all Asia north of Taurus (as Strabo says); it derived further a certain religious authority in the whole Province from the Great Goddess Artemis. The Ephesian Artemis was recognized, even in the first century after Christ, as in some sense a deity of the whole Province Asia. This belief was probably a creation of the Roman period and the Roman unity; and it deserves fuller notice as an instructive instance of the effect produced by a Roman idea working itself out in Greek forms. In this way Artemis of Ephesus was in A. D. 55 the deity "whom all Asia and the [civilized] world worshiped." Acts 19, 27.

Ephesus was on the great highway of the world, visited by many Christian travelers, some coming to it for its own sake, others merely on their way to a more distant destination. Especially, those who were traveling to and from Rome for the most part passed through Ephesus: hence it was already, or shortly afterwards, that is, after St. John addressed the Letter to the Church in Ephesus, known as the highway of the martyrs, "the passage-way of those who are slain unto God," as Ignatius called it a few years later, that is, the place through which must pass those who were on their way to Rome to amuse the urban population by their death in the amphitheater.

Today Ephesus has all the appearance of an inland city, or rather only a village. (According to Ramsay, *The Letters to the Seven Churches.*)

crucified and resurrected Savior of the world. He says to St. John that he should write to the *angels* of the Seven Churches. By the *angels* of the churches the pastors or bishops are understood. Of course, the letters are not only meant for the pastors, but also for their congregations or churches. The Savior says that He holds the *seven stars* in His right hand. By these *seven stars* again the pastors are meant. Jesus calls them stars, because they teach and preach the Word of God, which shines into the hearts of the members of the churches or congregations; the Word of God gives light, spiritual light. The seven churches or congregations the Savior calls seven golden *candlesticks* or lampstands. And He says that He walks among them. He wishes to say that He sees everything that is going on in the churches; nothing is concealed from His eyes, nor to His knowledge. The pastors as well as the congregations are under His supervision and authority. Therefore He has a perfect right to command St. John to write to them in His name, by His command.

His *first* letter the dear Savior addressed to the pastor and congregation at Ephesus. The congregation at Ephesus had been founded by the great Apostle Paul. After St. Paul had founded the congregations in Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, and Corinth on his *second mission tour*, he, on his way back to Jerusalem, stopt over at Ephesus. Here he began to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the Jewish synagogue, but though the Jews asked him to tarry longer with them, he consented not, but he promised them that he would come back after he had been at Jerusalem. He left Aquila and his wife Priscilla with them. Aquila and Priscilla had been converted by St. Paul in the city of Corinth. On his *third mission tour* the great apostle came to Ephesus and remained there for almost three years. During this time the Lord blessed his labors most abundantly, for the congregation grew mightily. As St. Paul preached nothing but the Word of God, and preached it in its entirety and purity, the congregation became well established in the doctrines of the Christian religion. After his stay at Ephesus for almost three years, St. Paul visited the European churches which he had founded during his second mission tour and then, going back to Jerusalem, he invited the elders or pastors of the Ephesine church to meet him at Miletus, where he charged them to take good spiritual care of the whole flock (Acts 20, 28—38). We know from the Bible that Apollos

and Timothy also served the Ephesian Christians as pastors, and, if Christian tradition has it correctly, also St. John ministered to the Ephesine church, until he was banished to the isle of Patmos by the Emperor Domitian.* Who the pastor was at the time the Savior addressed His letter to the church at Ephesus, we do not know, but we do know from our text, that he as well as the congregation were, generally speaking, orthodox in doctrine and church polity, for the Author of the letter *commends* them, saying in our text: *"I know thy works, and thy labor, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil; and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles and are not, and hast found them liars; and hast borne, and hast patience, and for My name's sake hast labored, and hast not fainted."*

Jesu tells the pastor and church at Ephesus that He knows how they worked faithfully and with the greatest Christian patience for Him and His kingdom. He knows that they did not and could not bear the wicked and ungodly among themselves, but that they, according to His command (Matt. 18, 15—17), had excommunicated those who became manifest as impenitent sinners; that they also had diligently guarded themselves against false teachers, inasmuch as they tried every one who came unto them claiming to be an apostle of the Lord; that they, furthermore, also showed true Christian patience with those who were weak in their faith and Christian knowledge, and did all within their power to bring them unto a good knowledge of the will of the Lord and urged them to serve Him with cheerfulness by a truly Christian life. Yea, Jesus also tells them, that it pleased Him very much that they had willingly and cheerfully suffered hatred and persecutions at the hands of unbelieving Jews and Gentiles for His name's sake. Yes, He also commended them, because they had shown their hatred against the false doctrines

* Domitian was a younger brother of Titus, who took Jerusalem. He reigned from A. D. 81—96. At first he was a good ruler, but after a few years he became a tyrant, banishing Christians and also Jews from Asia Minor. He also banished St. John to Patmos, which was a very rugged island south of Samos. Here St. John wrote his Book of Revelation (Apocalypse) about A. D. 96, shortly before Domitian was assassinated. Christian tradition tells us that St. John was permitted to return to Ephesus by Emperor Nerva, and that he died a natural death, being about 100 years of age. It is also said that St. John was buried at Ephesus.

and practices of the Nicolaitans, who under the cloak of Christianity had tried to mislead weak Christians in the Ephesine church. All this the dear Savior highly commended in His letter to them.

But the dear Savior also told the Ephesine church what He had against it; with what He was very much displeased. Of this I shall now speak to you in the second place.

2.

After Jesus had commended the pastor and church members at Ephesus for their Christian labor, patience, watchfulness, hatred and fight against false doctrines and practices, He says: *"Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love."*

The Savior, who walks among the candlesticks or lamp-stands, that is, among His churches or congregations, looks for the *first love*. What, then, is meant by the first love? From the commendations of Jesus it becomes evident that the Ephesine church still loved Him, His Word, and His Church. The pastor as well as the members would not have labored and suffered as they did for the Savior and His kingdom, if they had not loved Him at all. The Savior, therefore, does not tell them that they have lost all love to Him, but He tells them that they no longer had the *first love*. What is the first love? The first love is that which forgets everything but the Savior and thinks of nothing than Him and His divine love; it is that burning, glowing love which a bride has to her groom. That this is correct, we see from Jeremiah 2, 2, where we read: "Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the Lord, I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after Me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown." That was first love. Just as a loving bride will follow her groom wherever he must go, even into foreign countries, yea, even to the uttermost parts of the earth, so the Israelites followed the Lord God, when He led them out of Egypt into the promised land of Canaan. They asked Him no questions whatever; they followed Him into the wilderness, trusting Him implicitly. That was first love.

Thus it also was with the Church of the Reformation in the 16th century. When Luther and his co-workers began to preach the saving Gospel in its purity and entirety and with all its

sweetness, multitudes turned to them, and put all their hope in the Gospel of the crucified and risen Savior of the sinful world. Oh, how they did love the Savior, His Word, and His Church! That was first love.

Thus it was also when our forefathers established our dear Lutheran churches in the wilds of the New World. They had left Europe, because they could not serve the dear Savior there as they desired to serve Him. They loved Him, His Word, and His Church above all other things. And how they did labor! With what patience they did carry on the Lord's work! They tried the spirits to see whether or not they were of God. With those, who were not of the Lord—whether they called themselves preachers or Christians—, with all who did not truly believe in the Bible doctrines and did not prove their faith by true love to the Savior, they had no fellowship, and they suffered hatred and persecutions at the hands of false Christians and unbelievers for the sake of Jesus, His Word, and His Church. The love to Jesus prompted them to do as they did. They loved Him with a burning, glowing love. That was first love.

Thus it also had been at Ephesus in the earlier stages of the congregation, especially during the days when St. Paul, Apollos, Timothy and St. John—if tradition is correct—ministered unto them. But now things had changed in the church. Yes, though there was still Christian activity in the congregation, the driving power of this activity, was no longer the love to Jesus, His Word, and His Church, or in other words, the driving power behind their activities was no longer the first love. That the Savior hated; that was very displeasing to Him, and therefore He severely rebuked them. Jesus has a right to the *first* love, and He wants nothing less. Therefore He called on the Ephesian Christians to repent and do their first works. Of this I shall now add a few remarks in the third place.

3.

Jesus tells the Ephesine church: *"Remember, therefore, from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do thy first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent."*

The Ephesine church (pastor and members) should have remained on the heights of the first love and grown stronger. Since just the opposite had occurred, they really had fallen, for

works are not considered as good by God, unless they flow from true love to Him and the dear Savior. Only by sincere repentance, by a return to the first love, can things be righted. Unless they do truly repent and return to Him with their first love, which prompts works pleasing to Him, He will come quickly and take the light of His saving Gospel from their midst.

Of course, Jesus knew that not every single individual would repent, but He also knew that there were many in the Ephesine church who would repent and do the first works, if He would call their attention to their fall. And that was the reason why He had St. John to write this letter to the congregation and its pastor. To all that will truly repent, He gives this beautiful promise: *"To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God."* He promises eternal life to everyone that truly repents;—returns to his first love and first works, that is, works which flow from the first love. Being the very Son of God Jesus can and will fulfil His gracious promise.

The church at Ephesus did truly repent,* and the Lord did not take His Gospel from it as long as it truly believed in Him and truly loved Him. We know from the history of the Christian Church that for some centuries afterwards there was a Christian congregation at Ephesus. But finally, when the pastors and members of the congregation did no longer live in daily repentance, when they gave way to false doctrines and when their love to Jesus, His Word, and Church had died, He came and removed the light of His Gospel from them. For a thousand years already the Turk rules, where once many Christian congregations, among them that of Ephesus, had flourished.

The Savior's letter to the church at Ephesus was not in-

* The Ephesians especially are addressed by Ignatius with profound respect. He writes them, that he "ought to be trained by them for the contest in faith." He hopes to "be found in the company of the Christians of Ephesus." He is "devoted to them and their representatives." The tone throughout is that of one who feels deeply that he is honored in associating with the Ephesian Church through its envoys. (Ramsay, p. 77.)

Thus Ignatius, the bishop of the church in Antioch, Syria, wrote to the Ephesine Church shortly before he died for Jesus at Rome A. D. 108. He had been thrown to wild beasts. What remained of his body was taken to Antioch, Syria, A. D. 116 and buried. Ignatius was a scholar of St. John.

tended only for this church, for in our text we read: "*He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.*" This letter was intended for all churches at all times. It is, therefore, also directed to our Lutheran churches. This fact we must not overlook nor forget, and therefore we should examine ourselves, everyone for his own person, for the Lord walks also among our churches, and He sees everything,—not only what we do, but also whether or not we do it for His sake, out of true love to Him, His Word, and His Church. It is true, thanks be to God, that so far our congregation still has God's Word in its entirety and purity, and the Holy Sacraments are still being administered according to our dear Savior's institution. It is also true, thanks be to God, that there are still members in our congregation that serve the Lord with might. But, beloved fellow-Christians, let each examine himself whether or not *he* is serving the Lord, because he *loves* Him so; let each one examine himself whether, whatever he does for the maintenance and extension of Christ's kingdom, is done out of pure and true love to *Jesus*, the one and only Savior of sinful mankind. If the love to Him does not prompt us to willing and active service, then we have not the *first* love, and we must *repent*, or else Jesus will take His saving Gospel away from us as He has done with so many other churches since He addressed His letters to the seven churches in Asia Minor, who finally lost their first love to Him, His Word, and His Church and did not truly repent.

The Passion season, which we shall again begin next Wednesday, invites everyone of us to a searching of his innermost soul. Let us use this blessed season for such true searching of our soul, and prayerfully contemplate the bitter sufferings and ignominious death of our dear Savior. Then, my beloved friends, we shall redeem the time of grace still allotted to us by the gracious Lord, for the improvement and strengthening of our *faith in* and *love to* Jesus, who walks in our midst to bless us with spiritual gifts. So help us God for the sake of His Son Jesus Christ, our one and only Savior! Amen.

First Sunday in Lent.

Revelation, 2, 8—11.

And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These things says the First and the Last, which was dead and is alive: I know thy works and tribulation and poverty (but thou art rich), and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan. Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer. Behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days. Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches: He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.

The words of our text are the second of our dear Savior's Seven Letters addressed to the churches or congregations in Asia Minor. The first of these letters was sent to the Ephesian church. It contained, as we have heard in our last service, a commendation, a rebuke, and an admonition unto true repentance. Outwardly the church in Ephesus was very prosperous, and it was also orthodox. But one thing lacked at the time the letter was addressed to it: the first love to the Savior, His Word, and His kingdom. It was growing cold. That was a very dangerous thing, for it was a sign of its spiritual decay. When a man is lying at death's door, you know that he grows colder and colder. At first his fingers, then his hands, then his arms grow cold, and finally, he is cold altogether, and that is the end of his temporal life. The church in Ephesus was not dead as yet, but if not reinforced by the warmth of its *first love*, it would soon die. This the dear Savior would prevent, and therefore He addressed His letter to it.

With the church at Smyrna it was different. Outwardly it was a poor and struggling congregation. It had nothing to show up that is considered grand in the eyes of the world. It had many enemies and, therefore, it had to suffer very much. The Smyranean Christians were robbed of their earthly possessions, yea, many of them were even persecuted unto death.

But though the Smyranean church was hated and despised by many men and slandered and persecuted by them, there was One who thought very much of it; who loved it very dearly as we see from our text. Yes, Jesus loved the Smyranean church above all the other churches in Asia Minor. His letter to it is indeed a

love letter in the real and truest sense of the word. The Author finds nothing in the church which is worthy of censure or rebuke; no, He finds only such things which He admires and which He can cheerfully commend. Here was the *first love*, which He missed in the church at Ephesus. The Christians in Smyrna cared for nothing than for the dear Savior, His Word, and His kingdom. They could truthfully join the Psalmist of old and cry out: "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee. My flesh and my heart faileth; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever. For, lo, they that are far from Thee shall perish; Thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring from Thee. But it is good for me to draw near to God; I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare all Thy works." Ps. 73, 25—28. Yes, the church in Smyrna* was a model congregation in the best sense of the word.

* Smyrna was founded as a Greek colony more than a thousand years before Christ; but that ancient Aeolian Smyrna was soon captured by Ionian Greeks, and made into an Ionian colony. Ionian Smyrna was a great city, whose dominion extended to the east far beyond the valley, and whose armies contended on even terms against the power of Lydia. But Lydian power with its center at Sardis was increasing during that period, and Smyrna gradually gave way before it, until finally the Greek city was captured and destroyed about 600 B. C. by King Alyattes. In one sense Smyrna was now dead; the Greek city had ceased to exist; and it was only in the third century that it was restored to the history of Hellenic enterprise in Asia. There was, however, a State named Smyrna during that long interval, when the Ionian Smyrna was merely a historical memory.

Smyrna was treated more harshly than Ephesus by the Lydian conquerors: apparently the reason was that it was more typically Greek and more hostile to the Asiatic spirit of the Lydian realm, whereas the native Anatolian element was stronger in Ephesus. The purely Greek Smyrna could not be made to wear Lydian harness, and was destroyed. The half-Asiatic Ephesus was easily changed into a useful Lydian town without the complete sacrifice of autonomy and individuality.

The design was attributed to Alexander the Great of marking the triumph of Hellenism by refounding Greek Smyrna. But it was left for King Lysimachus, after Antigonos had made a beginning, to carry the design into effect. His refoundation of Smyrna and of Ephesus was a part of a great scheme, the completion of which was prevented by his death. The new Hellenic Smyrna was in a different place from the old Ionian city.

To its maritime character was due the close association with Rome which Smyrna formed at an early period. From the

Let us, then, beloved fellow-Christians, now direct our attention to it. By the assistance of the Holy Spirit, and in accordance with our text, the subject of my present discourse shall be:—

The Dear Savior's Letter to the Faithful Church at Smyrna.

Let me show,

1. *How Jesus comforts it in its trials and tribulations, and*
2. *How He encourages it unto faithfulness to the end.*

1.

We read in our text: "*And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These things says the First and the Last, which was dead and is alive: I know thy works and tribulation and poverty (but thou art rich), and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan. Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer. Behold, the*

time that the great republic began to interfere in the affairs of the East, common interest maintained a firm alliance and "friendship" (according to the Latin term) between Rome and Smyrna. A common danger and a common enemy united them.

As early as 195, when Antiochus was still at the height of his power, Smyrna built a temple and instituted a worship of Rome; this bold step was the pledge of uncompromising adherence to the cause of Rome, while its fortunes were still uncertain. After a century, when a Smyrnean public assembly heard of the distress in a Roman army during the war against Mithridates, the citizens stripped off their own clothes to send to the shivering soldiers. That showed faithfulness indeed, and therefore Cicero expressed the Roman feeling that Smyrna was "the city of our most faithful and most ancient allies."

Smyrna was a very beautiful city. Strabo says its beauty was due to the handsomeness of the streets, the excellence of the paving, and the regular arrangement in rectangular blocks. Smyrna boasted that it was the city of Homer, who had been born and brought up beside the sacred river Meles.

The patron-goddess of Smyrna was a local variety of Cybele, known as the Sipylene Mother. She became a more moralized conception in the Ionian Greek city; and Nemesis was the aspect which she bore to the Greek mind. In Smyrna alone, of all the Greek cities, Nemesis was regarded not as a single figure, but as a pair.

Since 1402 Smyrna has been a Turkish city; but the Christian element has always been strong and at the present time outnumbers the Mohammedan in the proportion of three to one, and the city is called by the Turks *Infidel Smyrna*, Giaour Ismir. Today it numbers about 200,000 inhabitants. (According to Ramsay.)

devil shall cast some of you into prison that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days."

The author of this letter calls Himself the *First and the Last, which was dead and is alive*. This paraphrase leaves no doubt whatever as to the author. There is but One who was dead and is alive and who, at the same time, is the First and the Last. This one is Jesus. He is the very Son of God, from eternity to eternity, and at the same time the Son of Man, who suffered and died for sinful mankind, in order to become the propitiation for our sins. But though He suffered and died for us and all sinful men on the cross and was laid into the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, He did not remain in the power of death, nor in the tomb, but on the third day after His death and burial He rose again, and He *lives*, lives to all eternity. Yes, He is the *First and the Last which was dead and is alive*. He walks among the golden candlesticks or lampstands, that is, among the congregations or churches, and therefore He sees everything and knows everything that they do and what they must suffer for His name's sake. He also knows the works and the tribulations of the church in Smyrna.

The church in Smyrna was the most faithful of the Seven Churches to which Jesus addressed His Seven Letters. It was orthodox to the core, and it had not lost its *first love* to Him, His Word, and Church, as the Ephesine church had done. Because it was still in its first love, it served the Lord most faithfully. It could not do otherwise, because it loved Him so.

The service of love which the church in Smyrna manifested forth, especially the untiring service of love by its pastor, whose name was Polycarp, — for he was the *angel* of the church at the time this letter was addressed to it, — filled the hearts of the heathen Greeks and the national Jews with hatred towards the faithful church. What St. Paul had written to the Corinthians many years ago, held good also of the time in which this letter was sent to the Smyrnan church: "We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness." 1 Cor. 1, 23.

The most bitter enemies of the Christians in Smyrna were the national Jews. They wanted to be true Jews, that is, God's children, but they were the "synagogue of Satan," as Jesus tells us in our text. Satan used them as his instruments of persecution against the Smyrnan church. These national Jews perse-

cuted the Smyranean Christians by circulating all kinds of base lies about them in the city and among the magistrates and the Roman officials. That is what their fathers had done wherever St. Paul and his co-laborers had founded a Christian congregation. But these Smyranean Jews were even more hostile to the Christians than their forebears had been. Their bitterness, perhaps, was caused by the conversion of many Jews to Christianity. Satan had harnessed them in his service, and they served him most faithfully. They, in company with many of the Gentiles in the city, persecuted the Christians with might and main. Yea, many members of the church had lost all their earthly possessions and lived in great poverty on account of these persecutions. But they suffered it all for the sake of Jesus, because they loved Him so.

Though they had lost their earthly possessions and were the innocent victims of vile calumnies and hatred, Jesus tells them that they are *rich*. Oh, how comforting that must have been to the faithful members and their pastor! Jesus, the very Son of God Himself, says that they are not poor, but rich. And thus it was, for they had Jesus and His Word in its truth and entirety. Indeed, they were rich above all human understanding.

But Jesus tells them in His letter that they must suffer even more, for He says: "*Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer. Behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison that ye may be tried: and ye shall have tribulations ten days.*"

The ten days are a specified time, not ten ordinary days. Jesus tells them that for a certain time even bloody persecutions shall come upon them for His name's sake; but He bids them to fear not. He wishes to say unto them: "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul." Matt. 10, 28. Though they be killed for His name's sake, they shall not lose anything but poverty and tribulations, but they shall gain everything that is blessed and glorious: everlasting life in heaven, where He will crown them with the victor's crown of eternal bliss and glory. Oh, how comforting were these gracious promises unto the faithful Smyranean Christians! They knew that after a martyr's death the crown of glory and life everlasting was to be theirs. That was comfort indeed.

It is through much tribulation that Christians must enter into the kingdom of heaven (Acts 14,22). That is true even to this very day, my beloved fellow-Christians. I need not call your

attention to the bloody persecutions of the Christians during the first three centuries (A. D. 64—311), nor to those in the time of the Reformation during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries; no; right recently many Lutheran and Russo-Greek Christians, pastors and members, were killed in the Baltic Provinces and Russia by the antichristian Bolsheviks. And if we ask, Why did the Bolsheviks kill them? we get but one true answer, Because those Christians would not deny Jesus Christ, the one and only Savior of sinful mankind. Yes, even in our native land during the World War many of our fellow-Lutherans were slandered and persecuted. Why? Because they were disloyal citizens? Indeed, not. Everybody that cares to know, knows that there are no more loyal citizens in any country than the true Lutherans, because all true Lutherans believe the teaching of the Bible in regard to Civil Government (Romans, 13, 1—7; Matt. 22, 21; 1 Tim. 2, 1—3; Titus 3, 1; 1 Pet. 2, 13. 14). Why, then, were they hated and persecuted? Because they believe in giving their children a thorough Christian training and in keeping aloof from the wicked ways of the worldlings. That is the reason why we Lutherans and other Protestants (Fundamentalists) are being hated and calumniated by the worldlings, sham-Christians, and all oath-bound secret societies. It is because we will not deny Jesus, His Word, and His Church, that we are despised and persecuted. It is just as it was at Smyrna. Faithfulness to the Savior, His Word, and His Church brings upon all true Christians hatred and persecutions at the hands of worldlings and, especially, the fallen or sham-Christians, who would have all people to accept their wishy-washy Christianity, which does not, and cannot, save a single sinner. And God only knows what persecutions are still awaiting all those who really believe in Jesus and love Him with all their heart. Unto all true Christians the encouraging words of Jesus in our text go forth: *"Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."* This leads us to the second part of our meditation.

2.

"Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches: He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death."

These encouraging words Jesus addressed to the members

and the pastor of the Christian church in Smyrna. Unto all the faithful He promises eternal life. Oh, a glorious promise! Men may kill them, Jesus tells them, kill their bodies, but their souls are not within the reach of wicked and bloodthirsty men. No, they cannot touch the souls of true and faithful believers in Jesus Christ, the one and only Savior of the world. As soon as they kill their bodies, their souls will be carried on angels' wings into Paradise (Luke 16, 22), into the heavenly mansions not made with hands, which Jesus Himself has prepared for those who truly believe in Him and cheerfully serve Him with loving hearts.

After Jesus had sent His letter to the church in Smyrna, the ten days of great tribulations came. National Jews and ignorant Gentiles visited the Smyranean church with bloody persecutions, and many of them, also their faithful pastor, Polycarp, suffered martyrdom.* They remained faithful unto the Lord, His Word,

* An account of the martyrdom of Polycarp has come down to us. I cannot refrain from giving it as I have found it in Uhlhorn, *Conflict of Christianity with Heathenism*, pp. 288—290: "The Proconsul had already yielded to the popular clamor so far as to execute a number of Christians by torture, or by exposure to the wild beasts, or by burning at the stake, when the multitude assembled in the amphitheater demanded in addition the death of Polycarp. 'Away with the Atheists! Search for Polycarp!' with shouts like these they besieged the Proconsul. Polycarp had withdrawn to an estate near the city, and, when he was sought there, escaped to another; yet two slaves were captured, one of whom under torture betrayed the retreat of the bishop. When the soldiers sent to take him prisoner approached the villa, Polycarp was in the upper story, and might easily have fled from there to the roof of the next house. But when urged to do this, he refused, and quietly went down to deliver himself up to the soldiers. He asked only a single hour for prayer. But he remained two hours in rapt devotion, so that even the heathen were moved by it.

Then the aged bishop was conveyed to the city on an ass. On the way he was met by the chief of the police, who took him up into his carriage, and said in a friendly manner: 'What harm can there be in saying: The Emperor, our Lord! and in sacrificing?' Polycarp at first was silent; but when they urged him, he quietly answered: 'I shall not do as you advise.' Then with abuse they thrust him so violently out of the carriage, as to injure one of his legs. But he went onward cheerfully as if nothing had happened. In the circus the Proconsul was awaiting him, surrounded by an immense multitude of people who had flocked thither at the news that Polycarp was captured. The Proconsul at first reminded him of his great age, and urged him

and His Church to their end. Those days were, indeed, trying days for the Smyrnan church, but, nevertheless, they were also blessed days for the martyred faithful, for what can be more blessed than to die for the Lord? What can be more blessed than to receive the crown of life out of His hand?

to regard it, and show his penitence by swearing by the Genius of the Emperor, and joining in the cry: 'Away with the Atheists!' The bishop looked with a steadfast countenance on the tumultuous crowd, and pointing to them with his finger, raised his eyes to heaven, and said: 'Away with the Atheists!' Then the Proconsul urged him further: 'Swear, and I release thee, revile Christ!' Then Polycarp answered: 'Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He has never done me wrong; how can I blaspheme Him, my King, who has saved me?' When the Proconsul yet again pressed him: 'Swear by the Genius of the Emperor!' Polycarp replied: 'If thou cherishest the vain thought that I will swear by the Genius of the Emperor, as thou sayest, and pretendest not to know who I am, hear it plainly: I am a Christian!' This was the decisive word, and the trial was properly at an end. Nevertheless the Proconsul still sought to save him, if he would only persuade the people to desist from their demands. But Polycarp refused: 'To thee I owed an answer, for we are taught to pay due honor to the powers ordained of God, but those men I do not think the proper persons to hear my defense.' In vain the Proconsul now threatened him with the wild beasts and the stake. Polycarp remained true to his confession, and so the Proconsul caused it to be proclaimed: 'Polycarp has confessed himself to be a Christian.' Hardly had the herald made the proclamation, when the whole multitude cried out: 'This is the teacher of impiety, the father of the Christians, the enemy of our gods, who teaches so many not to sacrifice, nor to worship the gods.' They rushed in a body to Philip, the Asiarch, who had charge of the public games, and demanded that he should let loose a lion upon Polycarp. When he refused, because the games were already finished, they clamored for him to be burned. With all speed they collected wood from the workshops and baths near by, and made a pile. Polycarp was unwilling to be fastened to the stake. 'Leave me thus,' he said, 'He who strengthens me to endure the fire will also enable me to stand firm at the stake without being fastened with nails.' Then after he had prayed with a loud voice: 'Lord God Almighty, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, I praise Thee that Thou hast judged me worthy of this day and of this hour, to participate in the number of Thy witnesses and in the cup of Thy Christ,' he was consumed by the flames. This took place on the 6th of April, A. D. 166."

According to Waddington and many others, Polycarp was burned at the stake on February 23, A. D. 155.

The poverty and persecutions which the Smyranean church suffered, harmed it not; on the contrary, they advanced its true welfare. So it always was. Poverty in the things of this world and persecutions on account of faithfulness to Jesus, His Word, and His Church, have never harmed the Church of Jesus Christ. "The blood of the martyrs became the seed of the Church." (St. Augustine.) Persecutions will keep hypocrites out of the churches. Trials and tribulations will drive true Christians closer to their God. It would not be good for most Christians, if they were exempt from trials and adversities. This the dear Savior knows, and therefore He permits all kinds of tribulations and trials to come upon them. Like surgical operations are very often necessary to save the life of the body, so earthly afflictions and tribulations are necessary in saving the life of the soul. This our heavenly Surgeon knows, and therefore He does not exempt us from tribulations and sorrowful experiences here upon this earth. But Jesus does not permit adversities and tribulations to try us a moment longer than is good and necessary for our spiritual welfare. As soon as He has attained His purpose, He lifts the heavy burden from us and we can again serve Him cheerfully. Thus we remain faithful unto Him to our end. That is what He wants us to do. Why? Because He wants to give us eternal life with its everlasting bliss and glory, for He says in our text: "*He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.*" He means to say, everyone that endures to the end in faithfulness to Him, shall not see the second death or eternal damnation, but have life everlasting; to him He will give the crown of life, eternal life in heaven.

If, therefore, we should "have tribulation ten days," that is, if it should please our Savior to permit bloody persecutions to come upon us for a time, as He suffered it to come upon the Smyranean Christians, then let us be faithful unto Him, His Word, and His Church as were the faithful Christians at Smyrna. Faithfulness unto death we have vowed unto our dear God and Savior on the day of our Confirmation. When we were asked, "Do you also, as members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, intend to continue steadfast in the confession of this Church, and suffer, even death, rather than fall away from it?" we solemnly answered, "We do so intend, with the help of God." Blessed we are, blessed to all eternity, my beloved fellow-Christians, if we

keep this vow, for Jesus also gives us this gracious promise: "*Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.*"

God help everyone of us to remain faithful unto Him and our dear Savior Jesus Christ, who died for us that we might live eternally! Yes,

Let thoughtless thousands choose the road
That leads the soul away from God;
This happiness, dear Lord, be mine,
To live and die entirely Thine.

Soon will the Lord, my Life, appear;
Soon will I end my trials here;
Leave sin and sorrow, death and pain.
To live is Christ, to die is gain.

Soon will the saints in glory meet,
Soon walk through every golden street,
And sing on every blissful plain,—
To live is Christ, to die is gain.

Amen.

Second Sunday in Lent.

Revelation 2, 12—17.

And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write: These things saith He which hath the sharp sword with two edges: I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is; and thou holdest fast My name, and hast not denied My faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth. But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold to the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. Repent, or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches: To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.

The words of our text are the third of our dear Savior's Seven Letters addressed to the Seven Churches in Asia Minor. Pergamos [or Pergamum] was a very wicked city, and therefore Jesus called it "Satan's seat." Satan ruled supreme in Pergamos. Pergamos was the official capital of the Province of Asia. Here the Roman Proconsul resided. Pergamos was the center of the Emperor-worship in Asia Minor. Here the first temple to Emperor Augustus had been built, about in A. D. 29. The Roman emperors were worshiped in this temple. Emperor-worship increased as the city grew, for later two more temples were erected to the emperors, one to Trajan and the other to Alexander Severus. There were also other, though smaller temples, in Pergamos, dedicated to the four patron gods of the Pergamites. These four gods were Zeus, Athene, Dionysos, and Asklepios or, as they were called by the Romans: Jupiter, Minerva, Bacchus, and Aesculapius. Of all the cities in Asia Minor Pergamos was first as the seat of idol-worship, which was always combined with all kinds of immorality. No wonder, therefore, that Jesus called this city the place where Satan had his seat.

In this idolatrous and very wicked city there was a Christian congregation. When and by whom the congregation had been founded, we do not know. We do know, however, that, before Jesus sent His letter to the church in Pergamos,* one of its pas-

tors, Antipas by name, had already suffered martyrdom on account of his faithfulness to the Savior. It is very likely that he was the first of the many Christian martyrs of Asia Minor.

The letter of Jesus to the Pergamenian church shows that the congregation as a whole consisted of devout and God-fearing Christians, but, nevertheless, the Lord found some things which He disliked, yea, hated, and these must be abolished, or else He will come against them with the sharp-pointed two-edged sword, that is, He will come to them in order to chastize and punish them.

Let us, then, beloved friends, by the assistance of the Holy Spirit and in accordance with our text, now direct our attention to:—

Our Dear Savior's Letter Addressed to the Church at Pergamos.
Let me show,

1. *That He commends this church highly, because it held fast to His name, and denied Him not;*
2. *That He rebukes it, because it had grown somewhat lax in the exercise of Christian church-discipline; and*
3. *That He demands of it true repentance and amendment.*

* An ancient city of Mysia, in Asia Minor, the capital of the kingdom of the same name. The city was situated in the valley of the Caicus, about 15 miles from the coast. The early history of the place is lost in legend, which declared that the name was derived from Pergamos, grandson of Achilles. In the fourth century B. C. it was the seat of a Greek population, but it was not till the early third century that it rose to prominence. There was a library there which rivaled that of Alexandria. To Pergamos was attributed the invention of a fine parchment for use in books when the jealousy of the Egyptians endeavored to check the activity of the Pergamites by prohibiting the export of papyrus paper. King Attalus III. (B. C. 138—133), left no heirs, and by his will bequeathed his kingdom freedom under Roman protection. An attempt of a pretender, Aristonicus, to seize the power, led to Roman intervention, and in B. C. 129 the Province of Asia was organized with Pergamos as its capital. The city long remained in this position, the seat of a provincial council, and an important center of Asiatic trade. On the summit of the Acropolis was the Temple of Augustus and Rome, and later a temple to Trajan and one to Alexander Severus were added. Under Turkish rule the old fortress was abandoned, but the unfortified town in the plain continued to exist and is now a thriving place of some 20,000 inhabitants, bearing the name Pergama. (According to New International Encyclopedia.)

1.

Jesus says to St. John in our text: "*And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write: These things saith He which hath the sharp sword with two edges: I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is; and thou holdest fast My name, and hast not denied My faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.*"

Who the pastor was at the time the Savior addressed His letter to the Pergamenian church, we do not know.* But from this letter we can see that he as well as most of the members of the congregation, were true Christians. Though they lived in an idolatrous and very wicked city they, nevertheless, held fast the name of Jesus and denied Him not, that is, they openly confessed Him to the people in Pergamos. They believed in Jesus with all their heart, and they willingly and cheerfully served Him. One of them, Antipas, had already sealed his faith in the Savior with his own blood, and perhaps others, too, who were not as prominent as he had been. Yes, the Christians in Pergamos were not ashamed of Jesus, nor of His saving Gospel. There cannot be the least doubt about it that they were ridiculed as people, who believed in a "crucified Jew," in a "malefactor," whom his own people had delivered into the hands of Pontius Pilate. Like as in other cities, here too, the national Jews were not slow in blaspheming Jesus and in deriding His followers, but the Pergamenian Christians held to His name, and denied Him not. They knew who He was in whom they had placed their confidence. Though He had been born in a lowly stable at Bethlehem in Judea by a poor virgin almost a hundred years ago, they knew that at the time of His nativity heaven had been opened and all the heavenly hosts had come down upon this earth to sing His praises and proclaim His deity. They knew that a wonderful star had pointed the way to Him for the Magi from the far East. They also knew that at His command all manner of diseases had given way to perfect health, that He had opened the eyes of the blind, the ears of the deaf, and that demons fled from demoniacs whenever they heard His voice. They knew that even the furious Sea of Galilee obeyed Him. They, furthermore, knew that Jesus had raised up

* The statement of de Lyra that his name was *Carpus* is only hypothetical, and, therefore, worthless.

some dead people by the power of His word and that, though He Himself permitted His enemies to crucify Him, and His friends, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, to lay Him away into a tomb, He had not remained in death, nor in the tomb, but had risen on the third day, as He had said that He would do, and thus proved His divine Sonship. Verily, the Christians in Pergamos had no reason to be ashamed of Jesus; they had no reasons to disown or deny Him. Therefore Antipas suffered temporal death rather than to deny Him who had suffered and died for him and all sinful men, and, no doubt, some of the members of the Pergamenian church followed their pastor in his faith and courage, and became Christian martyrs.

All this Jesus knew, because He walks among the churches and sees everything what they are doing and suffering for His sake, and He highly commends the Pergamenian church for its steadfastness in its faith and love toward Him. Yes, Jesus knew that it was indeed something worthy of His commendation that the Christians at Pergamos remained faithful to His name, and denied Him not, though they were living among an idolatrous and wicked people; in a city where Satan had his throne, where he ruled supreme in the hearts of the vast majority of people. But, nevertheless, my beloved friends, there were some things which Jesus disliked, yea, hated, in the church at Pergamos. Though the great majority of the members *individually* were above reproach, they were not up to the standard *collectively*; the congregation as a whole was somewhat lax in the exercise of true Christian church-discipline, for they had not excommunicated those among them that held to the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. Of this I shall now speak to you in the second place.

2.

Jesus tells the pastor and members of the church in Pergamos: "*But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold to the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.*"

The honorable history of the Pergamenian congregation had become tarnished by the practices of a minority of its members, who had been seduced by the doctrines of the Nicolaitan sect. In

Ephesus, as we have heard, the whole congregation hated the Nicolaitans, and Jesus commended it for this. In Smyrna, so it seems, the Nicolaitans had not made any efforts to break into the congregation. Here in Pergamos they had seduced some of the members, whilst in Thyatira quite a number of the members of the church held to the antichristian doctrine of the Nicolaitans.

What, then, beloved friends, was the doctrine of the Nicolaitans? They taught that, as long as a person believed in Jesus Christ, he could do anything he pleased. They said, as no man could be saved by his good works, so no man could be condemned on account of his evil deeds. They claimed that the holy apostles had not fully freed themselves from Jewish principles and influences and, therefore, they had made a big mistake when they demanded all Christians, also the Christians of Gentile extraction, to "abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood." (See: Acts 15, 28, 29.) They contended that there could be no harm to any Christian, if he would burn a little incense to the emperor, as he was only an idol, because an idol was nothing; nor could there be any harm to a Christian, if he "let nature have its course," and occasionally practise a little fornication, just as long as he had faith in Jesus Christ. Such were the doctrines of the Nicolaitans. As a rule the Nicolaitans belonged to the upper classes. Their maxim was, "Believe in Jesus Christ, and do as you please!" No wonder, therefore, that Jesus hated such antichristian seducers; such a perverted Christianity as they propagated. They did the very same thing which Balaam had done (Numbers 22-25; 31, 8-16), and still they considered themselves true Christians. Indeed, that was great spiritual blindness. And such deluded people the congregation did not excommunicate. Thus it made itself guilty of other men's sins (1 Tim. 5, 22). Therefore Jesus so severely rebuked it.

It cannot be denied, my beloved fellow-Christians, that there are many Nicolaitans in the churches this day, even if they are not called by this name. The churches are full of people, who want to be good and true Christians, yes, perhaps, they consider themselves as such, but they have the same antichristian principles which the Nicolaitans had. They will say, "Just believe in Jesus Christ, and do as you please, and all will come out right in the end." They believe, or at least they say that they believe, that it will not harm a Christian, if he will "burn a little in-

cense" to the antichristian secret societies, that is, that a Christian could be a good and true Christian though he belongs to a society or lodge which denies the Savior in its official ritual. They will tell you, "You Lutherans are too narrow-minded in many things." They contend, that a Christian very often must close an eye and do things, which perhaps he does not like to do, otherwise he cannot get "along well in this world" and cannot "move in the best of society." They assert that it will not harm a Christian, if he will at times conform himself a little to this world, by attending lewd picture-shows, theaters, and modern dances. They say that a Christian must not be so "overconscientious in everything," otherwise he cannot "get ahead in this old world." All of you, beloved fellow-Christians, have heard such or similar statements out of the mouth of people that want to be good Christians, have you not? But be not deceived, for such people are not Christians. They are either hypocrites or deluded people, who know not what God says in His Word. They are Nicolaitans; blind leaders of the blind. All who listen to such deluded people and follow them will be eternally damned, for the Savior Himself says that He hates them, and that He will come against them with His sharp-pointed two-edged sword,* that is,

* The distinguishing characteristic of this letter is the oft-recurring reference to the dignity of Pergamum as the seat of Roman official authority. The Author of the letter speaks as invested with an authority similar and yet immeasurably superior to that of the Imperial government. The sword which He bears is the sharp-pointed double-edged, cut-and-thrust sword used in the Roman armies, not the Oriental scimitar, or the mere cutting sword employed by many nations, and especially by the Greek soldiers. The name by which it is here called denoted a barbarian and non-Greek sword (originally a Thracian term), and therefore was suitable for the weapon borne by the Romans, who were a "barbarian" race, in contrast with the Greeks. The Romans did not themselves refuse the epithet "barbarian," e. g., the Roman adaptations of Greek plays are said by the Roman poets even to be "translations in a barbarian tongue." Hence St. Paul in Romans 1, 14, when he speaks of himself as indebted both to Greeks and to barbarians, means practically (though not exclusively) Greeks and Romans.

In Roman estimation the sword was the symbol of the highest order of official authority, with which the Proconsul of Asia was invested. The "right of the sword," *jus gladii*, was roughly equivalent to what we call the power of life and death (though, of course, the two expressions are not exactly commensurate); and governors of Provinces were divided into a

He will punish them; yea, He will condemn them, unless they truly repent and amend. Of this I shall yet add a few remarks.

3.

To the church in Pergamos, which showed such laxness in church-discipline towards such perverted people, the Savior says: "*Repent, or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches: To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.*"

These words of Jesus are, indeed, very solemn words, which everyone should take to heart. What He says He *can* and *will* do, for He is the almighty and veracious God. Woe therefore to all those, who are not such people as Jesus can and will acknowledge as *Christians*. It matters not what *you* think or say, or what *other people* think and say, but what Jesus thinks and says of you. If Jesus is against you, you cannot be eternally saved, and if He is for you, you cannot fail of everlasting life in heaven. He Himself has said: "The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him (man) in the last day." John 12, 48.

Jesus tells the Pergamenian Christians that, if they will overcome the wicked world and the perverted principles and practices of false Christians, *He will give them to eat of the hidden manna.*

What, then, is meant by the *hidden manna* which He promises to give to all victorious Christians? This question has been variously answered by the commentators. It seems to me, beloved friends, that this hidden manna is the undisturbed joy in heaven which all saints have in Jesus and His glory. Jesus Himself refers to the manna which God gave to the Israelites during the forty years of their wanderings in the wilderness, and He says to the Jews, to whom He was speaking, that He Himself was the Manna or Bread of God, which came down from heaven, for He tells them: "I am the Bread of Life; he that cometh to Me shall

higher and lower class, according as they were or were not invested with this power. When the divine Author addresses Pergamum in this character. His intention is patent, and would be caught immediately by the Asian readers of the Apocalypse. He wields that power of life and death, which people imagine to be vested in the Proconsul of the Province. (Ramsay.)

never hunger; and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst." John 6, 35. While we Christians are here in this sinful world we have *much joy* through our faith in Jesus Christ, our Savior and Redeemer, but our joy is not an *undisturbed joy*, as it will be when we shall be in heaven with Jesus, seeing Him face to face, and partaking of His glory.

Jesus also promises to all those Christians that shall overcome this wicked world and the seductions of all false religionists, a *white stone*, and in the stone a new name written. What does He mean to say? Here again the opinions of commentators vary much. It is, however, admitted by all Christian exegetes, that this is also a most precious promise of Jesus to all victorious Christians. Jesus gives a similar promise to the faithful Christians in Philadelphia (chap. 3, 12). This promise may help us to understand the one in our text. The Philadelphian Christians are assured that, if they will hold fast what He has given them, He will write *His new name* on everyone of them.

In ancient times a college of judges would declare their judgment in a case by casting a stone, either white or black, into the so-called electoral vase. If a judge would vote for the acquittal of the accused person, he would use a white stone, if he was against acquittal, he would use a black stone. It happened that the acquitted person would have his name written or engraved on the white stones by which his acquittal was brought about. Such stones were considered very valuable by himself and by his friends, and he would not have exchanged them for jewels. Jesus undoubtedly referred to this custom of the judges. And He is going to write the name of everyone who remains true to Him and overcomes the wicked world and the perverted principles and practices of deluded religionists on a *white stone*. It is going to be a new name for the victorious Christian, but also *His own new name*. In heaven the saints will not merely be known as *Christians*, the people of Christ; no, they shall be the people of *His new name* as He is hereafter revealed in glory. What that *new name* of Jesus will be, we will not learn while we are here upon earth. Oh, the inconceivable blessedness and glory of those that overcome the world with its idolatrous practices and sinful pleasures, and hold fast to Jesus, and deny Him not!

God grant, for the sake of Jesus Christ, that everyone of us may cling to Jesus in life and in death, and receive *His new name*! Amen.

Third Sunday in Lent.

Revelation 2, 18—29.

And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write: These things saith the Son of God, who hath His eyes like unto a flame of fire, and His feet are like fine brass: I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first. Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce My servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am He which searcheth the reins and hearts; and I will give unto every one of you according to your works. But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden. But that which ye have already hold fast till I come. And he that overcometh, and keepeth My works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of the potter shall they be broken to shivers; even as I received of My Father. And I give him the morning-star. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

In our text we have our dear Savior's letter which He addressed to the church at Thyatira. Thyatira was a city in Asia Minor. It was the home of Lydia, the seller of purple, who had been converted by St. Paul in the city of Philippi in Macedonia (Acts 16). Lydia and other women had gone to the riverside to pray, but they knew not the true God, nor His Son Jesus Christ, the one and only Savior of mankind. St. Paul preached Christ and Him crucified to them, and Lydia accepted Jesus by true faith and was baptized. After her conversion she invited St. Paul and his associates into her home. They accepted her kind invitation and very soon Lydia's husband and children also became converted and received holy Baptism. Also the jailor and all of his were converted and baptized. Thus the first Christian church had been founded on European soil.

It is generally supposed that the church in Thyatira was founded by Lydia and her family. Whether or not this is true, we do not know, as neither the Bible, nor the history of the

Church, tell us anything about it. But it may have been so. As a fact we know that a Christian congregation was found in Thyatira,* for in our text we have Jesus' letter addressed to it.

This letter is the longest of the Seven Letters addressed to the Seven Churches in Asia Minor, and it is also a very important and instructive one. Let us, then, beloved friends, now direct our attention to this letter. The subject of my present discourse shall therefore be under the guidance of the Holy Spirit:—

Our Dear Savior's Letter Addressed to the Church at Thyatira.
Let me direct your attention,

1. *To the introduction,*
2. *To the contents, and*
3. *To the conclusion of this letter.*

* Thyatira was situated in the mouth of a long vale which extends north and south connecting the Hermus and Caicus Valleys. Down the vale a stream flows south to join the Lycus (near whose left bank Thyatira was situated), one of the chief tributaries of the Hermus, while its northern end is divided by only a ridge of small elevation from the Caicus Valley. In the middle of that vale, with a very slight rising ground to serve for a citadel or acropolis, Thyatira was built by Seleucus I., the founder of the Seleucid dynasty, whose vast realm, extending from Hermus Valley to the Himalayas, was everywhere bounded loosely according to the varying strength of rival powers. Seleucus I. is mentioned by Josephus as having shown special favor to the Jews and made them citizens in the cities which he had founded in Asia. In the long peace of the Roman Empire Thyatira grew large and wealthy. It was the center of communication. Vast numbers passed through it. It commanded a rich and fertile vale. Many of the conditions of a great trading city were united there. This period of great prosperity and increase was only beginning when the Seven Letters were written. Like Pergamos it was strongly affected by the Nicolaitan teaching. Thyatira's tutelar god, whose full titles are recorded in inscriptions, was styled *Propolis* because he had his temple in front of the city, *Propator* as the divine ancestor (doubtless both of the city as a whole and specially of some leading family or families), *Helios* the sun-god, *Pythian Tyrimnean Apollo*, a strange mixture of Hellenic and Anatolian names. At the time our letter was addressed to the church in Thyatira there was also the Emperor-worship, as in all the Province of Asia. Now Thyatira lies buried in the bosom of the vale where it once stood. (According to Ramsay.)

1.

At one time when Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi. He asked His disciples, saying: "Whom do men say that I the Son of Man am?" And they said: "Some say that Thou art John the Baptist; some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets." Then He said unto them: "But whom say ye that I am?" Then Simon Peter gave this answer: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus then said unto him: Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven. Matt. 16, 13—17.

The question, "Who is Jesus Christ?" is the most important question which can be asked by sinful men. Why? Because no sinful man can ever be eternally saved, if he does not know the correct answer to this question. Everyone who does not believe with all his heart what St. Peter believed and confessed of Jesus Christ, namely, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," will be eternally lost, because Jesus Christ is the Godman Savior of sinful mankind. It is true what Doctor Luther says of Him in his most beautiful explanation of the Second Article of our Creed: "I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with His holy precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, that I may be His own, and live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, even as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true."

Yes, this most beautiful answer is surely true, because the Bible everywhere tells us that Jesus Christ is in deed and in truth not only the son of the Virgin Mary, but also the very Son of God. And as such Jesus Christ introduces Himself to everyone of the Seven Churches in Asia Minor. To the church at *Ephesus* He introduces Himself, saying: "These things saith He that holdeth the seven stars in His right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks." To the church at *Smyrna* He introduces Himself, saying: "These things saith the First and the Last, which was dead and is alive." To the church at *Pergamos* He introduces Himself, saying: "These things saith

He which hath the sharp sword with two edges." To the church at *Thyatira* He introduces Himself, saying: "These things saith the Son of God, who hath His eyes like unto a flame of fire, and His feet are like fine brass." To the church at *Sardis* He introduces Himself, saying: "These things saith He that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars." To the church at *Philadelphia* He introduces Himself, saying: "These things saith He that is holy, He that is true, He that hath the key of David, He that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth." To the church at *Laodicea* He introduces Himself, saying: "These things saith the Amen, the faithful Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God."

Each one of these seven exordiums proves that the Author would have everybody understand that He is not a mere man, but the Godman: God and man in one person. In His exordium to the church in *Thyatira* He expressly calls Himself the *Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and feet as fine brass*. He wants the *Thyatirans* to understand that He has supreme authority; that there can be no appeal from His judgments and no opposition against His power. No one can break His power, nor does anyone trust in Him in vain. He sees everything, for nothing can be concealed from His eyes; they can pierce through everything, and He can tread down all opposition. All this shows that He is in deed and in truth the almighty Son of God. Men must accept Him or there is no hope for them. His enemies must reel and stagger before Him, and be swept away like the stubble before the fire. Surely, beloved friends, such an exordium as we find in this letter to the church in *Thyatira* ought to set those people to thinking and move them unto such action as He demands. What He thinks of these *Thyatiran* church people and what He demands of them, we shall now hear in the second place.

2.

Jesus tells St. John to write to the *Thyatiran* church: "*I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and works; and the last to be more than the first. Notwithstanding I have a few things* against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess,*

* The words, "a few things," are not found in the best MSS. (Lange.)

*eat things sacrificed unto idols. And I gave her space to repent
eath things sacrificed unto idols. And I gave her space to repent
of her fornication: and she repented not. Behold, I will cast her
into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great
tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her
children with death: and all the churches shall know that I am
He which searcheth the reins and hearts; and I will give unto
every one of you according to your works. But unto you I say,
and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine,
and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak:
I will put upon you none other burden.* But that which ye have
already hold fast till I come."*

Jesus commends the Thyatiran church, because it was rich in good works. It practised charity abundantly; it served the Lord cheerfully; it clung to Him with a sincere faith, put its confidence in Him and in His grace; it showed patience in dealing with the weak fellow-Christians. It had not decreased, but rather increased in its activities for the Lord Jesus and for the needy and helpless among them. Yes, it was praiseworthy in the eyes of the Lord that the church in Thyatira had not grown cold in faith and works; that it still showed the first love. And He does not mince His commendation and praise.

Of course, the Lord speaks thus in commendation of the good and faithful members of the congregation, of those who had not been seduced by that woman Jezebel, who had wrought havoc in the congregation by her unchristian and perverse teachings. But He upbraids the pastor and the other faithful members of the church, because they had not done all within their power to oust that miserable woman and those who followed her pernicious doctrines from among themselves. In this respect they were somewhat like the Pergamenians. Thyatira was about forty miles southeast of Pergamos. It is so easy for one congregation to follow the bad example of another, especially, if they are not far apart from each other. Jesus severely upbraids the pastor and the faithful members of the Thyatiran church for not having excommunicated that miserable woman Jezebel and her adherents.

Jezebel called herself a prophetess of the Lord, but she was a prophetess of Satan, for her teachings were antichristian: a mixture of the doctrines of the Nicolaitans and Gnostics. Jezebel

* See: Acts 15, 28, 29.

taught her followers to do what the great apostles of Jesus, St. Paul, St. Peter, St. John, and St. Jude had so severely condemned. (See: 2 Thess. 2; 2 Peter 2; Second Epistle of St. John; Jude 4. 8.) She induced many of the Thyatiran Christians to *eat things sacrificed to idols and to fornicate*. Therefore Jesus places her on the same level with Jezebel, the ungodly and idolatrous wife of King Ahab, who had propagated the Baal-Ashtarte worship in Israel, and had killed or exiled the prophets of Jehovah. Even the great prophet of Jehovah, Elijah, had to flee for his life and conceal himself for about three years (1 Kings 17. 18). This Thyatiran Jezebel was a lewd, but also a very shrewd woman. In some manner she succeeded to conceal her true identity, and to preserve the appearance of a truly Christian lady, otherwise she could not have seduced so many of the members of the Thyatiran church, nor deceived the pastor.

This woman Jezebel at Thyatira reminds us of a woman who was her double: Mrs. Mary Baker Glover Patterson Eddy, the self-styled founder of Christian Science. Christian Science as taught by Mrs. Eddy, is, like the teachings of the Thyatiran Jezebel, a mixture of Nicolaitanism and Gnosticism* as we find it in the first centuries of the Christian era. Like as both Jezebels of old: Jezebel, the wife of King Ahab, and Jezebel, the Thyatiran prophetess, the modern Jezebel, Mrs. Eddy, has led many Christians away from their Savior into eternal damnation. Many Christians, having only a little knowledge of the doctrines of the Bible, become the prey of Christian Scientism or in other words, the prey of the devil. Christian Science cannot save a single sinner from sin, death, and damnation, because it denies all the fundamental doctrines of the true Christian religion as taught in the Bible.** It denies the Bible doctrine of the Holy Trinity, of the

* An eclectic system of religion and philosophy, existing from the 1st to the 6th century. It occupied a middle ground between paganism and Christianity....The Gnostics held that all existencies, material and spiritual, are derived from the deity by successive emanations, or eons. Christ was merely a superior eon. (Standard Dictionary.)

** Mrs. Eddy says, "God is a principle, not a person." "God is not a person who can say 'I' or be addressed as 'Thou'." "The supposition that there are good and evil spirits is a mistake." "A lie is all the Satan there is." "God never created matter." "Man co-exists with God." "Man is incapable of sin." "If soul could sin Spirit would be material instead of spiritual." "The

atonement for the sins of mankind through the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ, of salvation, and damnation. It teaches that there is no sin, no death, no damnation, and, therefore, that there is no need of a Savior such as Jesus is. Yes, Christian Science is a most damnable heresy, the most blasphemous and soul-destroying religion extant; it is anti-christian from beginning to end. All those who follow the teachings of Mrs. Eddy will be eternally lost, just as those deluded people were eternally lost who followed that Thyatiran prophetess. Christian Science, as all well-informed Christians know, is neither Christian, nor scientific: it is as unchristian as heathenism itself, and less scientific than cannibalism.

Jesus says in our text that He had given that woman Jezebel space to repent, but that she repented not. She had hardened herself against the Word of God, just as Pharaoh had done. Her followers, so Jesus assures in this letter, He will punish with death, except they repent. This He will do so that all the churches shall take warning.

As the Lord always fulfils His gracious promises, so He also always executes His dire threats, if sinners will not repent. It seems that the Nicolaitans in the church at Thyatira did not repent, and that Jesus therefore executed His dire threats against them: they died and were eternally lost in hell. Only the few faithful members remained alive. The congregation became very small, and insignificant for many years. It is not mentioned again in the Bible, nor in the history of the Christian Church.

theory of three persons in one God suggests heathen gods rather than the ever present I Am." "The Comforter I understand to be Divine Science." "John the Baptist declared that Jesus was the Messiah who would baptize with the Holy Ghost—Divine Science." "Sin is not forgiven; we cannot escape its penalty." "The second appearance of Jesus is unquestionably the spiritual advent of the advancing idea of God in Christian Science." "No final judgment awaits mortals." "One sacrifice, however great, is insufficient to pay the debt of sin." "The material blood of Jesus was no more efficacious to cleanse from sin when it was shed upon the accursed tree than when it was flowing in his veins as he went daily about his Father's business." Christian Science sees Jesus not as God but as divinity expressed in the ideal man. (Biederwolf, *The Unvarnished Facts about Christian Science.*)

But the Alogians or Alogi* make the claim that St. John could not have written the Apocalypse as the church at Thyatira had first been organized about one hundred years after his death. From this claim we can infer that for many years it was not even known outside of Thyatira that there was a Christian congregation in that city. The few faithful, however, had kept what Jesus had entrusted unto them: His saving Gospel, and the Lord fulfilled His promise unto them, as we see from the epilog of this letter. Of this I shall add a few words in the third place.

3.

The Lord says in His letter to the surviving faithful at Thyatira, — and this He also says to all His faithful during all times to the end of this world —, *“He that overcometh, and keepeth My works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of the potter shall they be broken to shivers; even as I received of My Father. And I will give him the morning-star. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”*

Indeed, my beloved friends, a precious promise of the Lord Jesus to all His faithful! To everyone that overcomes the temptations of the wicked world and the allurements of the false prophets and false Christians, as the faithful members of the church in Thyatira did, and remains true unto the Savior, His Word, and His Church, that is, holds fast to Jesus with his faith and willingly and cheerfully serves Him, He will give power over the nations, and he shall rule over them with a rod of iron, and as vessels of the potter he shall break them to shivers.

What does Jesus mean? He does not mean that His faithful shall rule over the nations with a temporal power, but with a spiritual power. That this is true, we see from the persecutions which the faithful suffered during the first three centuries and other times. The whole power of Imperial and Papal Rome could not subdue the true believers in Jesus Christ. Many thousands upon thousands gave their life for the cause of the dear Savior, and thus they triumphed over their enemies. The Church grew mightily, for the “blood of the martyrs became the seed of the

* A small and obscure sect of heretics in the second century who opposed the Montanists, denying that Christ was the Logos and ascribing the Gospel of St. John and the Apocalypse to the Gnostic Cerinthus. (New Intern. Encyclopaedia.)

Church." Yes, the power of Imperial and Papal Rome was broken to shivers through the power of the Gospel, which the true Christians believed and proclaimed. And by this power all true Christians will at all times rule over and bring to naught all the machinations of their enemies. And Jesus will give them the *morning-star*. This morning-star is Jesus Himself (Rev. 22, 16). Jesus will give Himself to His faithful in the life that is to come, in heaven, and make them co-heirs and co-regents with Him (1 Cor. 6, 2). The radiance of the Morning-star, that is, the glory of Jesus will reflect itself in His saints in heaven (Dan. 12, 3; Matt. 13, 43). "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches!" Amen.

April 23,
1933

Fourth Sunday in Lent.

Revelation 3, 1—6.

And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write: These things saith He that hath the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest and art dead. Be watchful and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die; for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember, therefore, how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast and repent. If, therefore, thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white; for they are worthy. He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the Book of Life, but I will confess his name before my Father and before His angels. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

In our text we have our dear Savior's letter to the church at Sardis in Asia Minor. Sardis at one time was one of the greatest cities in Asia Minor. It was located fifty miles east of Smyrna and about thirty miles south of Tiyatira. It was founded at least 1,200 years before the Christian era, and was for many years the capital of the kingdom of Lydia, whose last king was King Croesus, whose name has been a symbol of riches ever since his time. Sardis was the center of wise men as well as rich men. The richest being King Croesus and the wisest being Solon, who had come from Greece. It had a magnificent temple of the goddess Cybele, the rites of whose worship were noted for their unchastity.

At the time the Savior's letter was addressed to the church in Sardis, the city was rapidly approaching the end of its existence as a great city.* And thus it was also with the church. It

* Sardis was one of the great cities of primitive history; in the Greek view it was long the greatest of all cities. At the beginning of record it stands forth prominently as the capital of a powerful empire. Its situation marks it out as the ruling city, according to the methods of early warfare and early kings; it was however more like a robber's stronghold than an abode of civilized men; and in a peaceful and civilized age its position was found inconvenient. In the Roman period it was almost like a city of the past, a relic of the period of barbaric warfare, which lived rather on its ancient prestige than on its suitability to present conditions.

was a dying church, yea, many of its members were already spiritually dead, when the letter of Jesus was sent to it. The congregation at one time must have been a very active and flourishing one. It must have had a good name and must have been honored on account of its truly Christian character by the neighboring churches, for it was still considered a live church. But Jesus, who can see what mere men cannot see, says that it was a dying church. He says that it had a name that it lived but that it was dead to a great extent; it was actually dying. Spiritual death was creeping over the souls of the members. Only a few were really spiritually alive. The vast majority of the members were spiritually dead. A dead church is of no worth to the Savior, nor to sinful men; it is like a whited sepulcher: outwardly beautiful, but inwardly full of dead men's bones (Matt. 23, 27). Indeed, beloved friends, the church in Sardis was in a very deplorable condition! It had a name that it lived and was dead. This church is and should be a warning example to all Christian congregations. We, too, beloved members of this congregation, should take warning, lest we also have a name that we live while we are spiritually dead. It is an easy matter for church people to deceive themselves.

Let us now direct our devout attention to the letter of Jesus to the Sardian church for our warning and encouragement. By the assistance of the Holy Spirit and in accordance with our text, the subject of our present contemplation shall therefore be:—

Our Dear Savior's Letter Addressed to the Church at Sardis.
It contains,

1. *A stinging rebuke to the spiritually dead members.*
2. *A sharp admonition to the spiritually dying members.*
3. *A gracious promise to the spiritually alive members.*

1.

Jesus begins His letter to the Sardian church, saying: "*And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write: These things saith He that hath the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: I*

Sardis today is a wilderness of ruins and thorns, pastures and wild flowers, where the only habitations are a few huts of Yuruk nomads beside the temple of Cybele in the low ground by the Pactolus, and at the distance of a mile two modern houses by the railway station. (Ramsay.)

know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest and art dead."

Also in this letter, beloved friends, Jesus introduces Himself as the almighty Son of God, for He says that He has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars. By the seven Spirits of God He understands the Holy Spirit with His divine gifts and operations. It is Jesus Himself who sends the Holy Spirit to His Church on earth with His divine gifts and operative powers. By the seven stars He means the seven pastors of the Seven Churches in Asia Minor. He says that He holds them in His hand. They are responsible to Him for their work and behavior. Jesus is going to deal with them according to how they execute the functions of their sacred office. He holds them in His hand. No one can pluck them out of His hand, if He wishes to protect and shield them, and, on the other hand, no one shall be able to save them, if He is resolved to crush them in His hand, for He is the almighty Lord over all.

The dear Savior tells the Sardian church that He knows everything that takes place in its midst. He tells the members in general that they have the name that they live, but that they are dead, spiritually dead. There can be no more stinging rebuke than this one: *"Thou hast a name that thou livest and art dead."*

The church at Sardis is not rebuked by the Savior, because it held to any false and pernicious doctrines, such as the doctrines of the Nicolaitans, nor on account of eating things sacrificed unto idols, nor on account of committing fornication. No, it seems that *outwardly* Christian manners and customs prevailed among the members of the Sardian church. They did not wallow in the mire of gross sins which are shunned even by honorable wordlings. They still attended the divine services, especially on the great festivals of the Church and, perhaps, communed now and then; they also paid their church dues, because they believed that people could not get along without the Church altogether, and they also gave towards charity, and outwardly led a decent life. They kept up the appearance of true Christianity, but the souls of most of them lacked the true faith in Jesus and His redeeming grace. Most of them were hypocrites. They were like unto whited sepulchers: outwardly well kept and bedecked with beautiful flowers and adorned with imposing and pleasing monuments, but inwardly full of dead men's bones and decay. Yes, they were sham-Christians; Christians in name only. They had

rocked themselves into spiritual security. They were dreaming pleasing dreams and snoring in spiritual self-complacency, self-satisfaction, and self-righteousness. Yes, they were like that Pharisee in the Temple. The poor people were only deceiving themselves, however; for they could not deceive Him, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and who could see into the innermost recesses of their unbelieving and worldly-minded hearts, and therefore He comes to them with His stinging rebuke: "*Thou hast a name that thou livest and art dead.*" They had deceived themselves and many others, but they could not deceive Jesus. He was well aware of the fact that they were only sham-Christians, and their wishy-washy Christianity was altogether worthless, yes, an abomination, in His sight.

It is, indeed, a deplorable thing, my beloved friends, if a congregation or church has a name that it lives and is spiritually dead. But such is frequently the case with churches and people who profess to be Christians, for the all-seeing eyes of the Savior sees nothing worth seeing.

My beloved friends and fellow-Christians, we know that Jesus even nowadays walks in the midst of the Christian churches, as He did almost two thousand years ago, when He walked in the midst of the Seven Churches in Asia Minor. He observes everything that takes place in the churches throughout the whole world, for He is the omniscient Lord of all of them. What does He see? Don't you think that He sees things with which He has good reasons to be displeased? Is there not plenty of Sardian Christianity in our own beloved country? Are there not millions upon millions who have a name that they live and yet they are spiritually dead? Pray, tell me, my beloved friend, what must the Savior say when He sees so many wishy-washy Christians in outer Christendom? What must He say when He sees many, who would be true Christians, making pleasure trips on Sundays instead of hearing His saving word? What must He say of those, who complain about too many divine services, and who much rather attend a picture-show and a dance, than a divine service? What must He say of those, who cheat and defraud their fellow-men, and who belie and betray them as though they were very demons? What must He say of those, who wish to be regarded good and true Christians while they wilfully prevent the conception of children and kill the unborn? What must He say, when He finds so much worldliness within the so-called Christian

churches? What must He say, when He sees how those, who want to be good and true Christians, give so little and so begrudgingly towards the cause of His kingdom, while they waste large sums of money for pleasures and luxuries? What must He say, when He finds many so-called ministers of the Gospel in so-called Christian pulpits, who are preaching anything and everything except the Word of God? What must He say, when people throng the churches of these deniers of the Savior and His saving Gospel? I need not tell you, beloved fellow-Christians, what He must say of them. Yes, unto all these His stinging rebuke goes out: "*Thou hast a name that thou livest and art dead.*"

But not all in Sardis were already spiritually dead. No, there were many who were spiritually dying, and whose spiritual life might yet be saved. Unto these He comes with a sharp admonition. Of this I shall now speak to you in the second place.

2.

Concerning the spiritually dying, the dear Savior says to the pastor and to the congregation: "*Be watchful and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die; for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember, therefore, how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast and repent. If, therefore, thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know the hour I will come upon thee.*"

Not all the members of the Sardian church were already spiritually dead; no, there were some who had some spiritual life, but they were in great danger of losing it, lest they be watchful and repent. Therefore the Savior comes to them with His sharp admonition to be watchful and to repent. He reminds them of their former state, when they had first become Christians and had joined the congregation. At that time they had gladly received the saving Gospel. Through the preaching of the Gospel they had been made God's children, and as such they had rejoiced. They rejoiced that God had transplanted them out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of His dear Son. Yes, indeed, they were so blessed. Therefore they should do as they had done at first: give themselves body and soul unto the Lord. This they could do only by repenting.

The dear Savior, furthermore, calls upon the pastor and the spiritually alive members in the church to strengthen the weak and dying members, that is, they should teach, admonish, warn,

and comfort them in their fight against Satan, world, and the flesh. The weak and sick members are in need of help, and this help the stronger must give unto them. And when they have repented and regained what they had lost, they should hold fast, and henceforth always be on the alert, be ever watchful against the temptations of the devil and his allies, that is, against the unbelieving and wicked world, and their own evil lusts.

By this sharp admonition Jesus allots unto them a time of grace. If they will use it according to His will, then they shall be blessed indeed; but if they will not use it wisely, if they will not redeem the time of grace by true repentance and amendment, He will come upon them unawares, like as a thief comes, and then He will change the time of grace allotted to them into the day of dire judgment and punishment. If God's grace is despised it will become a millstone around the neck of the despiser which will drown him in perdition.

As there were some members in Sardis that were weak and dying spiritually, so there are always such in every Christian congregation. Therefore the admonition of Jesus to be watchful and to strengthen those that are weak and dying goes out to all pastors and all members of the churches that have a better knowledge of the Christian religion and that are stronger in their faith, to lend a helping hand to the weak and feeble, to the spiritually dying, so that they might overcome the temptations of the devil, the world, and the flesh. If the stronger give heed to the dear Savior's admonition in our text, many a weak and spiritually dying Christian will be saved. If this admonition is not heeded, beloved friends, then many spiritually weak and dying Christians will finally die spiritually and be eternally lost. Let us, then, beloved fellow-Christians, at all times think of the dear Savior's admonition in our text, and of the exhortation of His Apostle James, who said: "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he which converted the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins." (Chap. 5, 19. 20). Then the precious promise of the Savior in our text will also be verified in us. Of this I shall speak a few words in conclusion.

3.

Jesus concludes His letter to the Sardian church, saying: *"Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled*

their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white; for they are worthy. He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the Book of Life, but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

Yes, even in Sardis there were a few members who had not become worldlings, who had not turned their backs upon the Savior. Though they lived in a wicked city and among many sham-Christians, they, nevertheless, had not defiled their garments, that is, they had not lived in hypocrisy and worldliness, but in true faith they had willingly and cheerfully served the Lord. And these the Savior commends, and He promises them fellowship with Himself in the world to come. He says that they shall be clothed in white raiment, and that He will not blot out their names out of the Book of Life. When they became converted, became His disciples, He wrote their names into the Book of Life. They have remained faithful unto Him, and so He will not blot out their names out of the Book of Life, as He is compelled to do with the names of those who fell away from Him, His Word, and His Church, and became sham-Christians. The names of the faithful will always remain in the Book of Life,* and the bearers of these names shall walk with Him in white raiment, the mark of heavenly pureness and glory.

White was considered by the ancients as the color of innocence and purity, as we are assured by all historians. All Roman citizens wore the pure white toga, says Ramsay, on holidays and at religious ceremonies, whether or not they wore it on ordinary days. Especially on the day of triumph white was the universal color. And there can hardly be any doubt that the idea of walking in triumph similar to that celebrated by a victorious Roman

* The "Book of Life" is here evidently understood as an official list (so to say) of the citizens of the heavenly city, the true Jerusalem, the Elect City, peopled by the true Christians of all cities and provinces and nations. As in all Greek and Roman cities of that time there was kept a list of citizens, according to their class or tribe or deme, in which new citizens were entered and from which degraded citizens were expunged, so the writer of this letter figuratively mentions the Book of Life. There is a remnant in Sardis whose names shall never be deleted from the Book of Life, from which most Sardians have been expunged already. (Ramsay.)

general is here present in the mind of the Author when He uses the words: "*They shall walk with Me in white.*" Yes, the saints will be clothed in the robes of purity and honor in the heavenly mansions. The glory of the Lord Jesus will glorify the saints, so that their countenances will be as bright as the sun, and their garments white as snow, for they shall then be fashioned like unto His glorious body (Phil. 3, 21). O gracious promise of the Lord to all that shall overcome the devil, the world, and the flesh, and remain faithful to Him unto the end! On the great Day of Judgment Jesus will confess them before His Father and before the holy angels. (Matt. 10, 32.) Therefore, beloved fellow-Christians, let us be faithful unto Jesus to our end, confess Him before men, and willingly and cheerfully serve Him in true faith! This God grant for the sake of Jesus Christ! Amen.

Fifth Sunday in Lent.

Revelation 3, 7—13.

And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These things saith He that is holy, He that is true, He that hath the key of David, He that openeth and no man shutteth, and shutteth and no man openeth: I know thy works; behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it; for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept My Word, and hast not denied My name. Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan which say they are Jews and are not, but do lie, behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee. Because thou hast kept the Word of My patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. Behold, I come quickly; hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go no more out; and I will write upon him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, which is New Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from My God; and I will write upon him My new name. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

Tonight we have before us our dear Savior's letter which He addressed to the church in Philadelphia.

Philadelphia was founded about two hundred years before the birth of Jesus Christ by the Pergamenian king Attalus Philadelphus. It was situated about seventy-five miles south-east of Smyrna. At the time Jesus addressed His letter to the congregation in Philadelphia, the city belonged to the Province of Asia. It was the head of a district in which a number of Christian churches were established very early. With eleven other cities in Asia Minor, Philadelphia was almost totally destroyed by a great earthquake in A. D. 17. Emperor Tiberius treated Philadelphia with great liberality; and aided it to regain its strength both by grants of money and by remission of taxation. In gratitude toward the emperor, the Philadelphians built a temple in honor of Germanicus, an adopted son of Tiberius and a brother of Caligula, the successor of Tiberius. This temple was later destroyed by an earthquake, for it disappears completely from notice after A. D. 50. On account of frequent earthquakes in the region of Philadelphia, the city, so it seems, was not very populous. The congregation also, at the time of the Savior's letter, was not large, nor rich in the things of this life, but it was

very faithful to the Lord. Of course, the Philadelphian church was not perfect, for there is not and never has been a perfect congregation upon this earth; but it was, without doubt, the best of the Seven Churches in Asia Minor. Jesus does not censure it at all; no, He has nothing but encouragement and commendation for it. The letter of Jesus to the Philadelphian church is a very precious one. Let us, then, my beloved friends, by the assistance of the Holy Spirit, and in accordance with our text, now direct our devout attention to:—

The Letter of Jesus Addressed to the Church at Philadelphia.

Let me show,

1. *What Jesus so highly commends in this congregation, and*
2. *What encouraging and blessed promises He makes unto it.*

1.

Also to the church in Philadelphia Jesus introduces Himself as the very Son of God, for He says to St. John: "*And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These things saith He that is holy, He that is true, He that hath the key of David, He that openeth and no man shutteth, and shutteth and no man openeth: I know thy works.*"

The Author says of Himself that He is the Holy and the True One; He who has the key of David in His Hand. Jesus, of course, was not the door-keeper of the royal palace of King David in the city of Jerusalem. David and all Jewish kings had a door-keeper or guard, who had the key to the royal palace, and who opened and closed the door to people. Each one of these door-keepers was a type of Jesus Christ just as the royal palace, — or Jerusalem in the broader sense, — was a type of the heavenly kingdom of Jesus Christ. Jesus Himself is the door-keeper to His kingdom, He has the key to heaven in His hand; He alone opens and shuts the door to His kingdom according to His own good pleasure.*

* The Roman Catholic popes at all times have claimed that the pope in Rome has the key of heaven, that is, that he alone can open and shut the door of heaven, and that he can do it according to his own good pleasure. He, of course, opens the door to papists only, and shuts it to all true Christians. This he does with great pomp on every Maundy Thursday. All Lutherans as well as all other Protestants are banned by the Pope on Maundy Thursday of each year. According to the doctrines of the Roman Catholics none but papists are permitted to enter into the gates of heaven. The Pope, however, according to the Holy Scriptures,

If He opens the door, no power on earth or in hell can shut it, and if He shuts it, no power in hell or on earth can open it, because He is the Almighty One.

But Jesus is not only the Almighty One, but He is also the Omniscient One. As the Omniscient One He knows exactly what the church in Philadelphia is thinking and doing. He says: "*I know thy works.*" Nothing is concealed from His all-seeing eyes. He knows very well that the Philadelphian church is poor in the things of this life. He is also aware of the fact that it is not a large congregation. He is not ignorant of the fact that it has many and powerful enemies, who are plotting its destruction. But all their plottings will come to naught, because He loves the little faithful flock of Christians in Philadelphia. In His eyes the church in Philadelphia is a model one. He loves it very dearly, because it has a *little strength, and has kept His Word, and has not denied His name.* That is what He Himself says of it. Indeed, that is a high commendation out of the mouth of the True One. It matters not what the heathen people, nor what the national Jews say about the Philadelphian Christians, Jesus commends them very highly, because they have a little strength, and have not denied His name, and have kept His Word. He knows that He is loved and honored by the Christians in Philadelphia, and therefore He praises and commends them so highly. Oh, blessed every church which Jesus can commend as He commended the Philadelphian church!

There are many congregations in the world today which can boast of temporal riches and great numbers, but they have no spiritual strength, for they have not kept the Word of Jesus, but have cast it aside, and have denied His name; they have become traitors to Him, His Word, and His Church; they have back-slidden. They are spiritually dead. These churches are known as *liberal* churches, and their leaders call themselves *modern* theologians. They pride themselves with their large numbers and their "up-to-date" religion, but they are only deceiving themselves and their dupes, for they cannot deceive the true Christians, nor Him; who has the key of heaven, and who opens

is the very anti-Christ, the son of perdition (2 Thess. 2, 3). What Jesus said to the Sadducees, is true of all Roman Catholic popes and their duped followers: "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God." Matt. 22, 23. The fact is that the popes are the ambassadors of Satan.

and shuts the door of heaven. Jesus does not consider them His disciples, but disciples of the devil. He has no commendations for them, but only a stinging rebuke. And if they will not truly repent, He will damn them to the eternal fires of hell. Oh, that these liberal churches and their modern theologians might see the error of their way and turn themselves to Him, who alone is able to save to the uttermost all that come to Him!

Those churches only, my beloved friends, are in good standing with Jesus that have spiritual strength, that is, that keep the Word of Jesus, and do not deny His name. If a congregation be ever so small and ever so poor in the things of this life, if it keeps the Word of Jesus in its truth and purity, and denies not His name, then it is a truly orthodox, a truly Christian church, and Jesus commends it as He commended the church in Philadelphia.

Beloved members of this congregation, I implore you by the mercy and grace of God to hold fast to the Word of God in its truth and entirety! May there never be a time when it can be said that St. John's Evangelical Lutheran church at Red Bud has joined the ranks of the Modernists, and may God preserve this congregation for all time to come from false prophets, who glory in nothing else than man's wisdom! May God at all times give you preachers, who glory not in man's wisdom, but in preaching Christ Jesus crucified and resurrected for sinful mankind! For the Gospel of Jesus alone can save, and does save everyone that believes it with all his heart. Therefore beware of false prophets and false churches! Do not attend their services, and do not tune in your radio to the preachments of the liberal, that is, unchristian preachers! Cling to the old Gospel, because it alone is able to save you from sin, death, and damnation!

Because the church in Philadelphia kept the Word of Jesus and denied not His name, He gave unto it very encouraging and blessed promises. Of this fact I shall now speak to you in the second place.

2.

Jesus tells the faithful church in Philadelphia: "*Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it; for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept My Word, and hast not denied My name. Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan which say they are Jews and are not, but do lie, behold, I*

will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee."

The Savior promises to the Philadelphian church an open door, which no man can shut. He means to say that through the missionary endeavors of the faithful Philadelphian church many sinners shall come to a right knowledge of the saving Gospel; many heathen people, yea, even some of the national Jews, shall become converted, and they shall come and join the Philadelphian Christians in the worship of Jesus. Like in Smyrna, so here in Philadelphia, there were many national Jews, who tried their very best to destroy the Philadelphian church. They claimed to be God's children and they denounced the Philadelphian Christians as people that were far from God and the kingdom of heaven. But it was just the other way. The national Jews, who denounced the Gospel of Jesus Christ and denied His name, were of the devil, for Jesus Himself says that they were the synagogue of Satan. Satan had duped them, but Jesus says that some of them shall be converted to Him, and that they shall come to worship Him in company with the Philadelphian Christians. He Himself had opened the door for them, and no man nor devil was able to shut it. Yes, Jesus gathers His elect unto Himself, and He does it through the preaching of His saving Gospel (Acts 2, 47); for no one can become a true believer in Jesus Christ and be eternally saved by his own reason or strength. No one can convert himself (Jer. 31, 18). It is only by the gracious operations of the Holy Spirit through the means of grace (Word and Sacraments) that a sinner becomes converted. It is He who calls sinners by the Gospel, who enlightens them with His gifts, who sanctifies and keeps them in the true faith.

The Holy Spirit operates through the means of grace *only*. Where God's Word is not taught and where the Holy Sacraments are not administered, sinners can not and will not be converted. This being a Biblical truth, we should be very diligent in sending out missionaries to the heathen lands with the means of grace. It is not at all the business of the disciples of Jesus to *civilize* the barbarians, no, it is their solemn and sacred duty to *Christianize* the nations of this world for Him, for He gave them this command: "Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all nations,* baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son

* Literal translation of the Greek text.

and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you; and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." Matt. 28, 19. 20. Wherever and whenever this is done, Jesus opens the door of His kingdom, and many will go in, for it is written: "For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it to bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: so shall My word be that goeth forth out of My mouth; it shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." Is. 55, 10. 11.

Not all those people that simply join a church are saved, but only the true believers in Jesus Christ, for they alone are members of the Holy Christian Church or the Communion of Saints. All those, who join a Christian church without having true faith in Jesus Christ as the one and only Savior of sinners, are hypocrites. Unto them Jesus does not open the door to His kingdom. All those church-members that do not believe in Jesus Christ with all their heart, and do not willingly and cheerfully serve Him, do not belong to His Church, but, like the national Jews, spoken of in our text, to the synagogue of Satan and, unless they truly repent, they will be eternally lost.

Furthermore, beloved friends, Jesus promises to the Philadelphian church: "*Because thou hast kept the Word of My patience, I will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.*"

By the *Word of His patience* Jesus understands His Gospel. Because the Philadelphian church had kept and not denied His Gospel, Jesus says that He is going to keep it from the *hour of temptation*, which shall come upon all the world.

What does He mean by this hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world? This question has been variously answered by commentators. Some said, that He meant the Imperial persecutions, which began not long after Jesus had sent His letter to the Seven Churches.* Some said, that He meant the per-

* About two years after the Philadelphian church had received the letter of Jesus, Trajan became the Roman emperor, and he reigned until 117. His successor was Hadrian, who reigned until 138. During these forty years the Christians throughout the whole Roman Empire suffered bloody persecutions.

secutions of Papal Rome or the false doctrines of anti-Christ (the Pope). Again others said, that He meant the persecutions of the Turks or Mohammedans by which many of the churches in Asia Minor were finally destroyed. Still others said, that He meant the last evil days of this wicked world. Most probably we shall not go amiss, beloved friends, if we say that Jesus meant all these tribulations, for the Christian church in Philadelphia has not died out to this very day,* and, perhaps, will remain unto the end of this world. Even if it does not, we know that Jesus addressed His letter to the Philadelphian Church also to all the Christian churches throughout the whole world to the end of time. Yes, Jesus promised His divine protection to the faithful church in Philadelphia, and we know that He kept His promise, for He cannot lie.

Finally, Jesus gives this promise to the faithful church in Philadelphia: *"Behold, I come quickly; hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go no more out; and I will write upon him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, which is New Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from My God; and I will write upon him My new name."*

Indeed, a very precious promise! Not only during the time of their sojourn in this world, but also in the world without end, Jesus will not leave the faithful Philadelphian Christians; He will protect them in this present life and bless them with life everlasting, if they will hold fast to what they have: to Him, His Word, and His Church. And, of course, this same promise He gives to all true and faithful Christians throughout all the ages to the end of this present world, for He concludes His letter, saying: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

History tells us that many Philadelphians dwelt in tents outside of the city, because of the frequent earthquakes. Jesus tells the faithful Philadelphian Christians that in the world to

* Today Philadelphia is called Alashehr. Since the year 1391 it belongs to the Turks; but it still has five Christian churches or congregations, and it is the seat of a Greek Catholic bishop. The population is estimated at about 20,000. It is connected by rail with Smyrna. It is a "living monument of the faithfulness of divine promises in the midst of ruin." (See: Ramsay.)

come, He will make them pillars in the temple of God, and they shall not go out of it, as they so frequently had to go out of the city and camp outside of it. Having once entered His eternal kingdom, they and all true Christians will never be disturbed by anything. No earthquakes of trials, tribulations, crosses, temptations, bereavements shall disturb the saints in heaven. And they will be highly honored, for Jesus is going to write the name of His Father, and of the New Jerusalem, and His own new name upon them. What His new name will be, we do not know now, but will know when we shall be with Him in His eternal kingdom of glory and bliss.*

Let us, then, beloved fellow-Christians, hold fast to Jesus, His Word, and His Church, and receive the crown of everlasting glory out of the hands of our all-glorious King. God grant this for the sake of Him that hath the key of David, Jesus Christ, our one and only Savior! Amen.

* See the conclusion of the Savior's letter to the Pergamene church.

Sixth Sunday in Lent.

Revelation 3, 14—22.

And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write: These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot; I would that thou wert cold or hot. So, then, because thou art lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of My mouth; because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing, and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire that thou mayest be rich, and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve that thou mayest see. As many as I love I rebuke and chasten; be zealous, therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame and am set down with My Father in His throne. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

The text before us for our present meditation is the last of our dear Savior's Seven Letters to the Seven Churches in Asia Minor. Jesus addressed this letter to the church at Laodicea, which was situated in Phrygia. At the time this letter was sent to the Laodicean church, Phrygia belonged to the Roman Province of Asia. Before the Romans ruled Laodicea it was only a small town, but under the dominion of the Roman Caesars it became a large and flourishing city. It was known throughout the whole Roman Empire for its school of medicine. The Laodicean eye-salves were renowned and generally used by all the civilized peoples belonging to the Roman Empire. Laodicea was also a manufacturing center. In Phrygia was found a species of sheep that produced an excellent soft glossy wool, which was woven into several kinds of garments for home use and export trade. The glossy black Laodicean garments were world-renowned. In Laodicea there were also banking houses.* On account of its location, —being the gate-way to the far East, —Laodicea became a great commercial city, and therefore its people were very rich.

* Cicero brought with him in 51 B. C. orders to be cashed in Laodicea, as the city of banking and exchange. (Ramsay.)

The Christian congregation in Laodicea was founded about the middle of the first century, most probably by one of St. Paul's scholars by the name of Epaphras. Not far from Laodicea were two other Christian congregations, viz., at Colossae and Hierapolis (Col. 4, 13). We know from St. Paul's Epistle to the Colossians that he also wrote an epistle to the church in Laodicea (Col. 4, 16).

Of the Seven Churches in Asia Minor to which the dear Savior addressed His Seven Letters, the church in Laodicea was the worst. The Savior rebukes it and says that He is going to spit it out of His mouth, unless it will truly repent and amend. Let us, then, beloved fellow-Christians, now direct our devout attention to the church in Laodicea. The Laodicean church has many many sisters in our own time, and therefore we shall do well to hold it up to our view and learn and take to heart what Jesus has to say in regard to the Laodicean church. The subject for our present meditation shall therefore be:—

Our Dear Savior's Letter Addressed to the Church at Laodicea.
It contains,

1. *A terrible threat.*
2. *A sincere counsel.*
3. *An urgent appeal.*

1.

The characteristic of the other six letters is also found in the letter of Jesus to the church of the Laodiceans, for He introduces Himself to the Laodicean church as the very Son of God. He says to St. John: "*And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write: These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God.*"

Jesus calls Himself the *Amen, the faithful and true Witness of God*. He is what He says of Himself, for He is truth personified; He cannot lie; what He says is absolute truth. He means to say that the Laodiceans should give an ear to His sayings, because it is absolute truth what He says. He, furthermore, says of Himself that He is the *Beginning of the creation of God*. He means to say that He is the Eternal Logos, by whom all things were made (John 1, 3; Col. 1, 16). He therefore is also the Almighty One. Being the Amen, the faithful and true Witness, and the Almighty One, He is, indeed, the very Son of God, and therefore, He is also omniscient. He knows everything. He tells

the Laodicean church: "*I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot; I would that thou wert cold or hot. So, then, because thou art lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of My mouth.*"

The church in Laodicea was in a most deplorable condition, for it was neither cold nor hot, but lukewarm, and therefore Jesus threatens to spit it out of His mouth. That is a terrible threat.

Who, then, are they that are in a state of coldness? Those in a state of coldness are they that are not even professing Christians. The manifest unbelievers, such as the infidels and worldlings, are in a state of coldness. We all know of such people who care nothing for the Christian religion and pay no attention to it. They are outside of the Christian Church. Such people were the publicans and harlots in the Savior's time. Jesus, of course, does not at all approve of such a state of coldness, but He prefers it to a state of lukewarmness, because manifest unbelievers, infidels and open deniers of the Christian religion at least are not miserable hypocrites.

Who are they that are in a state of warmth? The state of warmth is the very opposite of the state of coldness. Those are in a state of warmth who believe the Gospel-truths with all their heart; who love Jesus, His Word, and His Church; who do all that they possibly can do for the dear Savior and His blessed kingdom. Such people were the holy prophets of God, the holy apostles of the Lord, the Christian martyrs, and all the true Christians from the beginning to the end of this world. They mean what they profess. They are willing to suffer the scorn and persecution of the worldlings and unbelievers on account of their faith. Jesus, His Word and Church they love with all their heart, and they willingly and cheerfully serve Him. This state of warmth Jesus loves and commends. It is His will that all should be true Christians here upon earth, so that He can give unto them eternal life with its bliss and glory. Oh, that every one of us might be in the state of warmth, that is, a true and upright Christian!

The lukewarm are those who are neither cold nor hot, that is, those who want to be true Christians, but are not what they want to be. The lukewarm are the hypocrites. These Jesus abhors. He says, that He is going to spit them out of His mouth.

The church in Laodicea was full of such lukewarm members.

They wanted to be looked upon as true Christians. They had been baptized; they made an outward show of Christianity; they were members of the congregation. But that was all. They had no true love for Jesus in their heart; they did not serve Him willingly and cheerfully. They wanted to be true Christians, but at the same time they wanted to be the friends of the worldlings. They were a self-satisfied and self-important set of hypocrites. This Jesus hated, and therefore He threatened them with total rejection, unless they would truly repent.

Outer Christendom is full of such lukewarm members even today. In many churches the lukewarm members are in the majority. They are not concerned about what the Bible teaches; they care not for what the Savior says; they will not stand up for the truths of the Christian religion. They will tell you, Let everyone believe what he wants to believe, just so he outwardly leads an honorable life. Their maxim is,

“For creeds and faiths let graceless bigots fight;
He can’t be wrong whose life is in the right.”

And in accordance with this wishy-washy, unchristian maxim they act. It is immaterial to such churches whether or not their members have been baptized; whether or not they have been duly instructed in the fundamentals of the Christian religion. All that these lukewarm churches require of those who would join them is, that they have their names enrolled upon the church record, and that they pay their church dues. Outer Christendom is full of such lukewarm congregations. Yes, it is even true that many lukewarm people are found in our Lutheran congregations. Like the ancient Israelites they worship Jehovah, but serve other gods. Their devotion is divided between God and mammon, between Jesus and the lodge, between the Church and the world, between holiness and worldliness. Whenever they are in the company of outspoken, upright Christians, they speak with the tongues of angels, and whenever they are in the company of avowed unbelievers and worldlings, they deny Jesus, His Word, and His Church. They are neither cold nor hot, but lukewarm. Though they consider themselves Christians, they only deceive themselves, for they are nothing but miserable hypocrites, and Jesus says that He will spit them out of His mouth; He will condemn them, unless they truly repent and amend, for He says to the lukewarm Laodicean church: *“I would that thou wert cold*

or hot. So, then, because thou art lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of My mouth."

Jesus is the Amen, the faithful and true Witness, who cannot lie. He will execute His terrible threat, unless these lukewarm Laodiceans will truly repent. And it is His wish that they do repent. He, therefore, gives them a very sincere counsel. Of this I shall now speak to you in the second place.

2.

Jesus says in His letter to the church in Laodicea: "*Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing, and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire that thou mayest be rich, and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve that thou mayest see.*"

From these words of Jesus it becomes evident that the Laodiceans were a self-deceived people. They were of the opinion that everything was well with them, and that they were in need of nothing. It is hard to understand how these people could think so well of themselves when the facts were just the opposite of what they supposed. The trouble with them was that they were lukewarm. Their lukewarmness made them indifferent and dull in self-examination. The people in Laodicea were well-to-do and rich in the things of this world, and for this reason they had a high opinion of themselves. That is the reason why they deceived themselves in regard to spiritual matters. They were self-satisfied and self-complacent people, and, therefore, not at all ready to be told what they should do. For this reason Jesus counsels them. Perhaps they will listen to good counsel. Jesus is very sincere in counselling them, because He wishes to save them.

As I have already said, Laodicea was the gate-way to the far East. All the trading people from the far East came through Laodicea when on their way to the West. They came with camels laden with all kinds of products and wares. Most of them sold what they had to sell to the Laodicean merchants. And these would again sell unto the Easterners what they had bought from the Westerners. The Laodicean merchants would trade and sell at highly advanced prices, and thus it came to pass that they became very wealthy. They had lots of gold. But their gold could

not save them from sin, from death, and from eternal damnation. Therefore Jesus counsels them, to buy gold of Him; gold that has been tried in the fire. What does He mean to say? What does He understand by the gold which they should buy of Him? By this gold Jesus means true faith in Him and His saving Gospel. This alone can save them.

In Laodicea were also sold the raven-black glossy raiments which were manufactured there. These were world-renowned. But these precious garments could not cover their spiritual nakedness, nor their sins. They were in need of a different raiment, if they would become fit for the society of heaven. They must have white raiment, which none but Jesus can give. The white robe of Jesus' blood and righteousness they must have, or else they cannot stand before God, and must be eternally lost. Therefore He counsels them to buy of Him this white raiment, so that they may cover their spiritual nakedness, and that the shame of their nakedness might not appear.

In Laodicea also medicines of various kinds were made, especially the Laodicean eye-salve, which was everywhere known. But this eye-salve could not cure spiritual blindness; it could not heal the Laodiceans of their self-deception, their self-esteem, and their self-righteousness. Therefore Jesus counsels them to buy of Him that they might have the eye-salve which alone can heal them of their spiritual blindness. This salve which Jesus wishes to sell them is the spiritual illumination of the Holy Spirit. Only if they will give heed to the preaching of God's Word and take to heart what they hear, can their dark hearts become illuminated by the operations of the Holy Spirit, and their cold hearts become warm with true love toward Him.

In Laodicea there were also banking houses. But these money centers could not issue checks which would be honored at the gate of heaven. Therefore Jesus counsels the Laodiceans to buy of Him. He can issue checks which will be honored by His heavenly Father.

But, beloved friends, how were the lukewarm people in the Laodicean church to buy these spiritual wares of Jesus, as they in reality were wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked? What could they give unto Jesus for the goods which He had for sale? Listen, beloved friends! What Jesus wants is this: He wants these lukewarm Christians to repent; He wants them to realize their spiritual helplessness and utter incapability of help-

ing themselves. He wants them to acknowledge their sins and come to Him with a penitent and believing heart; come unto Him just as they are. He wants them to come to Him saying from the bottom of their heart, —

Just as I am, without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidst me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come! I come!

Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind;
Sight, riches, healing of the mind,
Yea, all I need, in Thee to find,
O Lamb of God, I come! I come!

Yes, Jesus wants the lukewarm Laodiceans to repent. This fact becomes evident also by His urgent appeal to them. Of this I shall now add a few words in the third place.

3.

Jesus says unto the Laodiceans: *“As many as I love I rebuke and chasten; be zealous, therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame and am set down with My Father in His throne.”*

Yes, Jesus wants the lukewarm Laodiceans to repent. He is going to chasten them, because He loves them. Not all of them will He chasten, but some of them; those for whom He still has hopes that they will repent of their lukewarmness. Thus He is going to open their hearts for His admittance. He wants to enter their hearts that He may sup with them and they with Him, that is, that they may be eternally saved and thus enjoy eternal bliss and glory in the hereafter. Oh, that they might open their hearts to Him, — the loving Savior! He alone is able to make them perfectly happy in time and eternity!

If they will let Him in, He is going to let them sit with Him in His throne, just as He conquered and sits with His Father on His throne. Yes, everyone, who truly believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, and honored and served Him with a holy, Christian life, will, in the world to come, have part in Christ's glory forevermore. Oh, that we may give heed to the urgent appeal of our dear Savior! “A great and costly opportunity is ours. Let us not think, that we have no occasion to embrace it. Let us not

think, that we are rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing. Let us not suppose, because we have taken upon us the Christian profession, and have been favored with the sunshine of prosperity, that we are anything but poor, needy sinners in ourselves. We only deceive ourselves if we do. Every day, every hour, we need the Savior's atoning blood and gracious forgiveness. We stand continually in shameful nakedness till clothed with His righteousness. We are all the time full of blindness, ailment and folly, which His grace alone can heal. We are as much in want of the Savior's pure gold of grace, of the white raiment of His righteousness, and of the ointments of our Savior's gracious and healing forgiveness today as we have been in the past. If we think otherwise we only deceive ourselves. Therefore, He comes to us today laden with His precious goods, that we may buy of Him, and never think ourselves rich and happy except as we again and again renew and keep up our commerce with Him." (Seiss.)

*"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."** God grant this for the sake of Jesus Christ, our one and only Savior! Amen.

* Among the Seven Churches two only are condemned absolutely and without hope of pardon: Sardis is dead; Laodicea is rejected. And among the Seven Cities two only are at the present day absolutely deserted and uninhabited,—Sardis and Laodicea. Two churches only are praised in an unreserved, hearty, and loving way,—Smyrna and Philadelphia. And two cities have enjoyed and earned the glory of being the champions of Christianity in the centuries of war that ended in the Turkish conquest, the last cities to yield long after all others had succumbed,

Smyrna and Philadelphia. Other two churches are treated with mingled praise and blame, though on the whole the praise outweighs the blame; for their faith, steadfastness, works, love, service and patience are heartily praised, though they have become tainted with the false Nicolaitan principles. These are Pergamum and Thyatira, both of which still exist as flourishing towns. One church alone shall be moved from its place; and Ephesus was moved to a site about three kilometers distant, where it continued an important city until comparatively recent time, though now it has sunk to an insignificant village. (Ramsay.)

We have
to a
today
series.

Good Friday.

Is. 53, 3—7.

He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief, and we hid as it were our faces from Him; He was despised and we esteemed Him not. Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth.

Our text is taken from the Book of Isaiah. The Book of Isaiah, without doubt, is the most important one of the seventeen strictly prophetic books of the Old Testament, and in our Bible it is properly placed at the head of the prophetic books. Isaiah, that great, divinely appointed prophet to the Israelites, lived and proclaimed God's messages to them about 750 years before the birth of Jesus Christ. Moses, the first great prophet of the Old Testament, lived about 1,500 years before Christ. Isaiah, therefore, was active as God's preacher and prophet during the time half way between Moses and Jesus Christ, namely, 750 years after Moses and 750 years before Christ.

Just as Isaiah was the greatest of the Old Testament prophets, so his book of prophecy is the greatest of the prophetic books, both in regard to size and contents. Isaiah has rightly been called the "Evangelist of the Old Testament," for no other prophet has given us so many wonderful prophecies concerning the person and office of the Savior as he has. And if we look at these Messianic prophecies, as uttered by the great prophet Isaiah, we find that the language he uses is very simple, yet forceful and beautiful; his messages are grand, but likewise true and comforting; his prophetic visions are numerous, yet withal clear and exact in every detail. When we read such wonderful passages, as for example, the forty-second, forty-third, fiftieth, fifty-second, fifty-third, fifty-fifth, sixtieth and sixty-second chapters, we cannot fail to see the hand of God directing every stroke of the pen in the hand of His servant Isaiah.

In his fifty-third chapter the great prophet foretells the suffering and death of our Lord and Savior. Although the dear Savior was crucified almost 800 years after Isaiah wrote his prophecy, the picture which the prophet presents to us in this chapter is so realistic, so accurately sketched, that it seems to us as if Isaiah had been present at Calvary and witnessed with his own eyes the events which he describes so graphically in our text. The picture Isaiah here presents to us of the suffering Christ is, indeed, a colorful one, correct in outline, detail, and background. Yes, it is a masterpiece; and yet, it is a very sad, touching, heart-breaking portrait.

Let us, then, beloved friends, in accordance with our text, and by the assistance of the Holy Spirit now direct our attention to —

The Great Prophet Isaiah's Prophecy of the Suffering Savior.

Let me show,

1. *That the prophet describes the great severity of the suffering, and*
2. *That he impresses us with the fact that the Savior's suffering is substitutional.*

1.

Beginning his prophecy of the bitter sufferings of the world's only Savior and Redeemer, Isaiah says, as we read in our text: "*He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief, and we hid as it were our faces from Him; He was despised and we esteemed Him not.*"

If ever a man was despised and rejected of men it was the Savior of the world. From the time of His birth in a lowly stable at Bethlehem in Judea to His plain burial in the sepulcher of Joseph of Arimathea, Jesus was despised and rejected of men. Of the many people who heard Jesus preach and who saw Him perform His many miracles, only a comparatively small number believed in Him. The followers of Jesus were at no time more than a small flock. It is, indeed, true that thousands upon thousands came to see and hear Him, but many were hypocrites, while others came out of mere curiosity. Again, others were selfish and came hoping to receive material benefits; and yet others, chief among them the Pharisees, and scribes, came in order to find fault with Him, to criticize His words and actions. Even of those, who called themselves His followers, His disciples, we read that they

left Him and walked no more with Him (John 6, 65); they forsook Jesus, preferring to Him money and pleasures, and thus they despised and rejected Him. We hear of Nicodemus that for a while he was ashamed of Jesus and, therefore, came to Him only by night. We remember how Peter despised and rejected the Savior by denying Him thrice, and how Judas Iscariot betrayed Him for the sake of a few miserable pieces of silver, which subsequently were used for buying a piece of ground to bury strangers in it, and which, perhaps, also holds his suicidal remains until they will join his poor soul in hell on the Day of Judgment. And when things came to the very worst, when the disciples saw Jesus being led away in chains to several mock-trials and subsequent crucifixion, all of them forsook Him and fled. Not one of them remained with Him. Oh, how true the words of the great prophet in our text: *"He is despised and rejected of men."*

But, beloved friends, Jesus was not only despised and rejected of men; no; He Himself was, as Isaiah says, *"a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief."* Jesus was, indeed, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief! There are more than a thousand pages in our Bible, and yet we do not read on a single one of these pages that Jesus ever laughed, but repeatedly the Scripture tells us that He wept. Yes, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief was Jesus! It was not only the terrible suffering He endured during Holy Week in Gethsemane, on Gabbatha, and Golgatha that reveals Him to us as a man of sorrows, but the whole time He was upon this earth He was acquainted with grief, as a poet has well said,

His whole life was one continued chain
Of labor, sorrow, and consuming pain.

He had no home of His own, but He went from one place to another throughout all of Galilee, Samaria, and Judea, preaching and ministering unto the people. He lived on alms, on what people gave Him. He Himself being holy, without sin, saw the wickedness and sinfulness of the people all around Him, and it was this fact of beholding human depravity on all sides day after day which caused Him to be a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. He saw the perverseness of men's hearts, but He also saw the helplessness of their bodies, the result and reward of their sinful and depraved hearts. Truly, He was acquainted with their griefs, their troubles, their sicknesses, their ailments, and

wants. Yes, more than that: He sympathized with them and helped them. Indeed, Jesus was acquainted with the griefs of His fellow-men; He shared them with them.

But He was also acquainted with grief inasmuch as He Himself suffered grief. In the garden of Gethsemane He was so overcome with grief that an angel from heaven was sent to strengthen Him. Later, led from one highpriest to another; dragged from one unjust ruler to another; clad in a scarlet robe which had been thrown about Him for the purpose of insulting Him; with a crown of sharp thorns clamped down on His head so tightly that the blood trickled down His face; surrounded by a jeering and hooting mob of fanatical enemies who insulted Him, spat in His face, and slapped Him whenever it pleased them to do so; cruelly scourged by the order of the Roman governor Pontius Pilate; bleeding and bruised, He was a most pitiful man to behold, so that Pontius Pilate, presenting Jesus in this pitiable condition to the mob, cried out: "Behold the man!" Jesus a man of sorrows? Jesus a man acquainted with grief? Ah, yes! Surely, Jesus was a man of sorrows! And yet, this was only a small part of His sorrow and grief, for consider the agony and pain He suffered on the cross on Calvary, being crucified between two malefactors!*

But after all, dear friends, it was not the thorns on His bleeding head; not the nails driven through His hands and feet, which caused Him the greatest grief. No; don't you hear Him shouting from the cross: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" To be forsaken in this terrible hour by His friends and disciples was grievous, indeed, but to be totally forsaken by His heavenly Father,—that was unbearable, that was His greatest grief. Being forsaken by His Father was like being in hell itself. But Jesus bore even this greatest of all griefs, and a moment later we hear Him crying out His cry of victory from the cross, for He cries out: "It is finished!" And with a prayer in His heart and on His lips He dies. Yes,

Stricken. smitten and afflicted,
See Him dying on the tree!
'Tis the Christ by man rejected;
Yes, my soul, 'tis He! 'tis He!
'Tis the long expected Prophet,
David's Son, yet David's Lord;

* According to tradition their names were Dismas and Gesmas.

Proofs I see sufficient of it:
'Tis the true and faithful Word.

Tell me, ye who hear Him groaning,
Was there ever grief like His?
Friends through fear His cause disowning,
Foes insulting His distress;
Many hands were raised to wound Him,
None would interpose to save;
But the deepest stroke that pierced Him
Was the stroke that Justice gave.

Indeed, Isaiah spoke the truth when he cried out concerning the Messiah, whose sufferings he beheld by a vision almost eight hundred years before, "He is despised and rejected of men! A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief! He was wounded! He was bruised! He was chastized! He received stripes! He was oppressed! He was afflicted; yet He opened not His mouth! He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth!"

The bitter suffering and death of Jesus was a *substitutional suffering, a vicarious death*. Of this I shall now speak to you in the second place.

2.

Let us go back to Jerusalem for a moment, my beloved friends. The streets are alive with people; thousands upon thousands of Jews having flocked to the city to observe the feast of the Passover. Many of them had seen Jesus being led in chains through the streets to the Praetorium; they had been present; they had seen Him scourged; they had heard the sentence which the unjust Roman governor had pronounced upon Jesus. Most of them probably had even joined in the chorus of the mob and had shouted at the top of their voices: "Crucify, crucify Him!" They had seen Him carry His cross to Calvary, where they had witnessed His crucifixion between two malefactors. What impression did all this make upon them? Why, they imagined that Jesus of Nazareth was getting what He deserved. They did not pause to inquire whether Jesus had been given a fair trial or not. No; they took it for granted that Jesus was guilty of everything laid to His charge,— of being a blasphemer, a deceiver, an enemy of His people and country. They thought that Jesus was being punished by the just God for *His own evil deeds*. However, they were badly mistaken. Jesus had done nothing for which He deserved to be punished. Jesus was blameless, holy, undefiled, with-

out sin. Why, then, must Jesus die? Isaiah tells us in our text: "*Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth.*" Jesus suffered the agonies of the cross as our *Substitute*. He suffered and died for us. Isaiah mentions this fact twelve times in this chapter. Our transgressions of the divine Law, our sins, the sins of the whole world were laid on Jesus, for Isaiah says: "*The Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*" St. Paul avers: "God made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." 2 Cor. 5, 21. Jesus is the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world (John 1, 29). Yes, Jesus had come into this world that He might redeem sinners from eternal damnation by His *substitutional* suffering and death. "*Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows. He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed.*" We confess with the Christian poet:—

My burden in Thy passion,
Lord, Thou hast borne for me,
For it was my transgression,
Which brought this woe on Thee.

If Jesus had not died for us, all of us would have been lost forever. But thanks be unto God! Jesus has redeemed us, not with gold or silver, but with His holy precious blood, and with His innocent suffering and death, that we might be His own, and live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, even as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true.

God grant that, after beholding the awfulness and severity of our Savior's sufferings, we may recognize in Him our living and dying Substitute, our one and only Redeemer, and accept Him as such by true faith. And then, having found our Savior,

may we also make every effort to lead many others, who are as yet in spiritual darkness and are living without hope, to Him, by whose stripes *they* and *we* are healed. Let us tell sinners that—

There is a fountain filled with blood
Drawn from Immanuel's veins,
And sinners, plunged beneath that flood,
Lose all their guilty stains.

And above all, let this be our daily heartfelt prayer—

My faith looks up to Thee,
Thou Lamb of Calvary,
Savior divine!
Now hear me while I pray;
Take all my guilt away;
O let me from this day
Be wholly Thine!
Amen.

Easter Sunday.

Matt. 28, 1—15.

In the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulcher. And, behold, there was a great earthquake; for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning and his raiment white as snow; and for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men. And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye; for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly, and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead; and, behold, He goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see Him; lo, I have told you. And they departed quickly from the sepulcher with fear and with great joy, and did run to bring His disciples word. And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail! And they came and held Him by the feet, and worshiped Him. Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid; go tell My brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see Me. Now when they were going, behold, some of the watch came into the city, and showed unto the chief priests all the things that were done. And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole Him away while we slept. And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you. So they took the money, and did as they were taught; and this saying is commonly reported among Jews until this day.

The plot of the enemies of Jesus of Nazareth against His life had been carried out, for Jesus had been tried, sentenced, and crucified. Hanging on the cross between two malefactors, He had died with a prayer upon His lips. Having received permission from Pontius Pilate to give Jesus a decent burial, a number of the dear Saviors friends removed Him from the cross, wrapped Him in linens and laid Him away in a sepulcher which belonged to Joseph of Arimathea. His enemies rejoiced greatly, for the Man, whom they hated so intensely, had died and had been buried.

Nevertheless, the chief priests and elders of the Jews were worried. They knew of the Savior's prediction that He would rise again. That prediction must not be fulfilled; they must prevent this resurrection by all means. Accordingly, they persuaded the Roman governor to send a guard of Roman soldiers to the

tomb. As a further precaution they had the sepulcher sealed with the governor's own seal. Anyone breaking that seal was liable to punishment by death. In their opinion every precaution had now been taken, and they need have no further worry. Satisfied that their villainy had been crowned with success, they returned to Jerusalem. But they had fooled themselves. In less than three days the Roman guards lay trembling on the ground and became as dead men; yea, the governor's seal had been broken and the door of the sepulcher had been carried away, and Jesus of Nazareth had risen.

As soon as the guard of soldiers had recovered from their stupor, they hurried to Jerusalem to inform the chief priests of Christ's resurrection, for they were honest men. When the chief priests heard what had happened, they were stunned and horrified. "What shall we do?" they asked one another. It did not take these Jewish Jesuits very long, however, to scheme a way out of their dilemma. What did they do? We read in our text: *"And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole Him away while we slept. And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him and secure you. So they took the money and did as they were taught."*

Miserable hypocrites, blind fools they were! Surely, the proper thing for them to have done would have been to have given honor and glory to God, to have acknowledged their guilt, and to have repented. But this they refused to do, and so God finally gave them over to their evil ways and barred them from His throne of grace. Oh, how terrible it is when God feels Himself compelled to cast such wilfully impenitent sinners into the pit of everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels!

Even to this day God will have to damn all those who refuse to believe in Jesus Christ, the crucified, but risen Savior. Therefore, beloved fellow-Christians, let infidels and scoffers deny the Lord and His saving Gospel, let them scoff and blaspheme, if they insist on bringing God's just judgment upon themselves; we Christians do not doubt what the Gospel tells us, for we believe the angel's Easter-message: *"He is not here; for He is risen!"* By their confession of faith at the empty tomb of Jesus, all true Christians show that the Easter-message brings unto them joy and comfort. In accordance with our text, and by the

assistance of the Holy Spirit, let me now call your devout attention to—

The Confession of All True Christians at the Empty Tomb of Jesus.

They cheerfully confess,

1. *That the risen Jesus of Nazareth is truly the very Son of God,*
2. *That through Him they have been redeemed from all their sins and became reconciled to God, and*
3. *That on the Last Day they will be raised up unto life eternal.*

1.

Jesus had always asserted His divine Sonship. He said: "I and My Father are one" (John 10, 30). "He that seeth Me, seeth Him that sent Me" (John 12, 45). "All men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father" (John 5, 23). To His dying day Jesus adhered to His declaration of being the very Son of God, for when Caiaphas said unto Him: "I adjure Thee by the living God, that Thou tell us whether Thou be the Christ, the Son of God," Jesus answered: "Thou hast said" (Matt. 26, 63.64).

The disciples and followers of Jesus called Him the Son of God. Jesus never rebuked them for calling Him the Son of God. When Simon Peter confessed his faith in the diety of Jesus, saying: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," Jesus answered: "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 16, 15—17).

By His every word, act, and deed, especially, by His great miracles, Jesus had proved His claim of being the very Son of God. However, the Jews in general and the chief priests and elders in particular, refused to believe in Him; they would not accept His great miracles as manifestations of His divine Sonship, but, on the contrary, they maliciously asserted that He was in league with Beelzebub, the chief of the devils.

We know that Jesus publicly had told the Jews that they would kill Him, but that He would rise again on the third day. If Jesus, therefore, kept His word and arose from the grave on the third day, then there cannot be any doubt about it that He was, indeed, what He claimed to be: the very Son of God. Did Jesus keep His promise? Indeed, He did, for we read in our text: "*In the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first*

day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to the sepulcher. And, behold, there was a great earthquake; for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning and his raiment white as snow; and for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men. And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye; for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly, and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead; and, behold, He goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see Him; lo, I have told you. And they departed quickly from the sepulcher with fear and great joy, and did run to bring His disciples word. And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail! And they came and held Him by the feet, and worshiped Him. Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid; go tell My brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see Me."

Yes, it is a fact, proven beyond any doubt: Jesus was victorious over death and the grave. By His glorious resurrection He had positively established the fact that He is the very Son of God. And yet, as in those days most of the Jews refused to believe in Him, so most people in our time also reject Him and His saving Gospel. Yes, unbelievers today are just as vehement in denouncing the deity of Jesus as were most of the Jews of old. In spite of all the evidences which prove His deity, they will not believe in Him, but they reject Him and His saving Gospel. Thus they harden their hearts more and more and remain obdurate. The glad Easter-message is scorned by them. They simply deny the Savior's resurrection and resort to fraud and bribery, as did the chiefs of the Jews, in an attempt to get others to assist them in ridiculing the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

We, beloved fellow-Christians, and all who stand for common honesty, believe that there cannot be the least doubt about the glorious resurrection of our dear Savior. We believe the ancient secular historians; and, above all, the Bible.* Hence we

* Even *Celsus*, the earliest literary opponent of Christianity, and *Appollonius of Tyana*, Pythagorean philosopher, both of whom lived during the early Christian era, concede the resurrection of Jesus Christ, at least indirectly.

confess that the risen Jesus of Nazareth is truly the very Son of God.

But our confession includes more than that. We also confess in the second place that through Jesus Christ we are redeemed from all our sins and reconciled to God.

2.

Early on Easter morning when Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to the sepulcher, they were greatly amazed to find an angel there instead of the body of Jesus; however, the angel said unto them: "*Fear not ye; for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly, and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead.*" Later, when Jesus met them on the way, He said unto them: "*All hail! And they came and held Him by the feet, and worshiped Him. Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid; go tell My brethren, that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see Me.*"

Why should His disciples be informed as quickly as possible of His resurrection? I answer, Because they should know that now they have been redeemed from all their sins and reconciled to God. Jesus wanted them to know that His great work of redemption had now been completed and that, as a result, they were now acceptable at the throne of His heavenly Father.

In like manner, my dear fellow-Christians, Jesus our risen Savior, desires to have the glad Easter-message proclaimed throughout the whole world that all men, all sinners, may learn the precious truth that through Him they have been redeemed from all their sins and reconciled to God.

It is to be expected, of course, that unbelievers will not join the believing Christians in expressing gratitude to God for the glad Easter-message. To unbelievers the Easter-message of the angel is unwelcome news. They cannot bear to hear it, and they even offer the Christians money and other inducements to keep them quiet or to induce them to say with the Roman soldiers: "*His disciples came by night and stole Him away.*" However, as true Christians cannot be silenced by bribery, they become the object of hatred and persecution at the hands of the unbelievers and scoffers, as did the holy apostles and early Christians when they went out to preach the Gospel of the crucified, but resurrected Jesus Christ.

It is, indeed, true, beloved fellow-Christians, that when we

boldly confess our faith in the glorious Easter-message and assert that we have been redeemed from all sins and reconciled to God, we must have certain proof for our assertion. And, thanks be to God, our contentions are based upon facts. The certain proof of our redemption and reconciliation is Christ's resurrection on Easter morning. Our Lord's resurrection proves that His work of redemption is complete and satisfactory to the Father in heaven. If the Father had not been entirely satisfied with the sacrifice which Jesus brought for us, then He certainly would not have resurrected Him on the third day. The Scriptures do not only tell us that Jesus arose from the grave, but also that God the Father raised Him up; hence it must be true that Jesus Christ is the propitiation for our sins (1 John 2, 2). As sure as it is that Jesus Christ became our substitute, who suffered, died, and was buried for us, just so certain it is that He was raised for us (Rom. 4, 25), and that we Christians have been redeemed from all our sins and reconciled to God.

But you ask, perhaps, Is Christ's death and resurrection of benefit to us Christians only, or did He die and arise also for the infidels and unbelievers? Indeed, He died and rose also for the unbelievers and scoffers. His work of redemption was for *all* sinners.

Why is it, then, that so many are eternally lost in hell? It is because they reject Jesus and His work of redemption. "They deny the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction" (2 Pet. 2, 1). In spite of all that Christ has done for them they are lost. But it is their own fault, for without Jesus Christ there is no salvation. If you do not believe, my dear friends, that Jesus is your personal Savior, you cannot be eternally saved. If you accept Him as your one and only Savior then, my dear friends, you will be eternally saved, for it is written: "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3, 16.

Finally, fellow-Christians, we also confess with all true Christians, that on the Last Day we will be raised up unto life eternal. Of this I shall speak a few words to you in conclusion.

3.

Suppose that Jesus Christ had not risen from the dead,—what then? St. Paul answers this question, saying: "If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then

they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished" (1 Cor. 15, 17, 18). If Jesus Christ had not risen from death and the grave, none of us could be raised up on the Last Day unto eternal life. No, then all would be resurrected unto damnation. Jesus made these promises to all those who truly believe in Him: "Because I live, ye shall live also" (John 14, 29); and again: "And this is the will of Him that sent Me, that everyone that seeth the Son and believeth on Him, may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the Last Day" (John 8, 40).

O how comforting it is for us to know, to be certain, that our Savior, having Himself risen from the dead with a glorified body and ascended into heaven will, on the Last Day, also call our bodies forth from their graves to eternal life, when they shall be made like unto His glorious body (Phil. 3, 21). When our last hour has come, what blessed comfort it will be for us and all true Christians to be able to say with the Christian poet,

Jesus lives! no longer now
Can thy terrors, Death, appall me;
Jesus lives! by this I know,
From the grave He will recall me.
Brighter scenes will then commence;
This shall be my confidence.

Jesus lives! henceforth is death
But the gate of life immortal;
This shall calm my trembling breath,
When I pass its gloomy portal.
Faith shall cry, as fails each sense,
"Jesus is my confidence!"

May Jesus Christ, our victorious Lord and Savior, give us and all Christians strength and courage to remain true to this our glorious Easter-confession: "He lives, and we shall live also!" May He grant us grace and boldness so that we may joyfully proclaim to all the world that, based on the indisputable fact of the glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ, we Christians have the privilege and the duty to confess: *Jesus of Nazareth is truly the very Son of God; we sinners have been redeemed through Him from all our sins and reconciled to God, and on the Last Day He will surely call us forth out of our graves to life everlasting.* Hallelujah! Amen.

First Sunday after Easter.

Psalm 100.

Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands. Serve the Lord with gladness; come before His presence with singing. Know ye that the Lord He is God; it is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people, and the sheep of His pasture. Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise; be thankful unto Him, and bless His name. For the Lord is good; His mercy is everlasting; and His truth endureth to all generations.

Again we have commemorated the two greatest days in the annals of this world's history: Good Friday and Easter Sunday. Without these two days, that is, without the blessed message which they bring unto us, we would be without hope in this world. Good Friday tells us of the bitter sufferings and the ignominious death of the Savior of the world, and that He has purchased and won us and all mankind from sin, death, and the power of the devil; for by His sufferings and death on the cross on Calvary He paid the extreme penalty for sinful men, and thereby He reconciled all sinful men to His heavenly Father. Without this message,—Good Friday's message,—it would be far better for us to be brutes than men, for without the redemption that was wrought by Christ Jesus every human being would be eternally lost in hell. We, therefore, gratefully sing on Good Friday:—

To Thee, Lord Jesus, thanks we give,
Who diedst for us that we might live,
And through Thy holy, precious blood,
Didst make us righteous before God.

But without Easter Sunday we could not be sure of our gracious redemption, for by His glorious resurrection our dear Savior attached His divine seal to His redemptive work. By His glorious resurrection from death on Easter Sunday He proved beyond any possible doubt to every candid and unbiased mind that He is and ever shall be the one and only Savior of sinful mankind. No wonder, therefore, that all true Christians greatly rejoice and sing doxologies unto God on Easter Sunday and throughout the whole church year, for Jesus has made our redemption sure through His resurrection. He redeemed all mankind that all might be His own, and live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence,

and blessedness; that they might not live unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them and rose again (2 Cor. 5, 15). Yes, indeed, my beloved fellow-Christians, we should live unto Him, we should serve Him, who died and rose again so that we might live forever; but we *should serve Him with gladness*, as we learn from our text. Why? By the assistance of the Holy Spirit, and in accordance with our text, let me now answer the important question:

Why Should We Serve the Lord With Gladness?

David answers in our text,

1. *Because He hath made us His people, and the sheep of His pasture, and*
2. *Because it is the will of the good and gracious Lord that we show our gratefulness unto Him by cheerful service.*

1.

David, the greatest of all psalmists, cries out in our text: "*Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands. Serve the Lord with gladness; come before His presence with singing. Know ye that the Lord He is God; it is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people, and the sheep of His pasture.*"

In this beautiful Psalm King David sings a joyful song, a true doxology, unto the Lord, and he tries his very best to get all his people to join him in his song of exultation. He exhorts them to make a joyful noise unto Jehovah, for he knows that those only can make a joyful noise unto Him, whose hearts are filled with joy in the Lord. And all those whose hearts are filled with joy in the Lord, and who make a joyful noise unto Him, will also serve Him with gladness. The great king of Israel is doing all within his power to make truly Christian optimists of all the Israelites, because he is well aware of the fact that only truly Christian optimists are capable of serving the good and gracious Lord with gladness.

The Israelites had all reasons in the world to be joyful, and to serve the Lord with gladness, for He had done wondrously unto them. David wanted them to remember the blessings of the Lord with which they had been blessed. The greatest and best of all the divine blessings which they had experienced was, in the estimation of King David, this one, that the good and gracious Lord had made them *His people, and sheep of His pasture*. That was, indeed, the greatest of all blessings. God had

called the father of the Israelites, Abraham, from among his heathen associates, and made him His beloved child. Unto Abraham the Lord had given the gracious promise that He would separate his seed from all the other nations, and make it His chosen people. This gracious promise the Lord sealed unto Abraham by instituting the Ordinance of Circumcision. When the descendants of Abraham had greatly multiplied, the Lord gave them another ordinance in order to seal unto them His promise concerning the Messiah. This the Lord did in the days of Moses, the greatest of all Jewish prophets. This ordinance was the Passover. Yes, the Lord had made the Israelites His people. It was an act of grace. Israel had not merited any such kindness. Unto this people He also gave His Word, and prophets to preach it in its truth and purity. His Word and Sacraments were the pastures upon which He led His sheep. And, lo, how many were the temporal blessings which the Lord bestowed upon His people! Time will not permit me to enumerate them to you. Read especially the historical books of the Old Testament Scriptures and you cannot do otherwise than admit that the Lord went before His people like a shepherd goes before his sheep, and that He showered upon them innumerable blessings, both spiritual and temporal. Surely, Israel had all reasons in the world to make a joyful noise before the Lord, and to serve Him with gladness, and thereunto King David exhorted them, saying: *"Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands. Serve the Lord with gladness; come before His presence with singing. Know ye that the Lord He is God; it is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people; and the sheep of His pasture."*

These words of King David concern also us, my beloved fellows in the Christian faith, for we also are the people of the Lord and the sheep of His pasture. What the good and gracious Lord did unto the Israelites, He has done unto us also. At the time David wrote this beautiful Psalm by divine inspiration, our forbears were heathen people, and they worshiped idols and served them with a willing heart. They knew not the true God, who made them; they knew not the true Savior, who redeemed them from sin, death, and the power of the devil; they knew not the Holy Spirit, the great Comforter and Sanctifier. But what did the good and gracious Lord do? He made us His people, and sheep of His pasture. Through the means of grace, that is, through His Word and Sacraments, we were born again and be-

came God's children, His people. We were by nature also children of wrath, but now we are believing Christians; God has called us out of the kingdom of darkness, and has transplanted us into the kingdom of His beloved Son Jesus Christ, into the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints. Through Holy Baptism we were made heirs of eternal life, for in Baptism our sins were washed away, and the Holy Ghost enkindled saving faith in our heart. And by the preaching of His Word and through the Sacrament of the Altar the good and gracious Lord has kept us in the saving faith to this very day. All this the Lord has done to every one of us who really believes in Him with all his heart. Richly and daily He forgives unto us and all true believers in Christ all our sins. And, lo, my beloved friends, how manifold have also been the temporal blessings which the Lord bestowed upon us from the days of our youth to this present day! Like as a shepherd cares for his sheep, so the good and gracious Lord cares for us. Pray tell me, have we not all reasons in the world to make a joyful noise unto the Lord? And should we not serve Him with gladness? Indeed, indeed! Surely, daily we should come before Him with singing, for He has been so kind and good to us.

The Lord has also been very good and gracious to our Church and Synod. He has increased our numbers from year to year. Everywhere He opens unto us new doors. From all parts of the world the cries come to our Synod for more laborers, for preachers, teachers, and missionaries. Our institutions of learning are crowded to their very doors. The divine blessings have been so bountiful that we are obliged to enlarge the tents of our Church and Synod everywhere. Yea, we have all reasons in the world to make a joyful noise unto the Lord, and to serve Him with gladness. We and all our fellow-Christians throughout the whole world are His people, and the sheep of His pasture. All His people, wherever they may be living in this world, love Him, and He loves them. His love is past finding out. Surely, we should serve such a gracious and good Lord with gladness! But we should not only serve Him with gladness, because we are His people, and the sheep of His pasture, but also for this reason, because it is His will that we show our gratefulness unto Him by a very cheerful service. And of this fact I shall now speak to you in the second place.

2.

David says in our text: *“Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise; be thankful unto Him, and bless His name. For the Lord is good; His mercy is everlasting; and His truth endureth to all generations.”*

David exhorts his fellow-worshipers unto true gratefulness towards the good, merciful, and truthful Lord. He does this, because he knows that such is the will of the Lord. David wrote by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. *“Serve the Lord with gladness.”* These words in our text are, therefore, a divine command. Only those, however, can do it who are grateful unto the Lord for His manifold blessings.

David and his people were grateful unto the Lord, and therefore they did serve Him with gladness. It was, indeed, a joyful noise unto the Lord whenever the thousands upon thousands of believing Israelites came together for worship in the great Temple. They entered the gates and the courts of the Temple by singing with all their heart. Psalms 120 to 134 were “songs of degrees,” that is, they were sung by the Israelites when they went up the steps which led to the Temple of the Lord. But the believing Israelites did not only serve the good and gracious Lord with their lips, but also with material gifts for the Temple and its upkeep. When the Temple was to be erected in the city of Jerusalem, the willing and cheerful service of the Israelites was astounding. In First Chronicles 29, we are told of the willing and cheerful service of King David and his people. King David’s *personal* donations were enormous, for he gave three thousand talents* of gold, seven thousand talents of refined silver, and the chiefs and princes of Israel gave five thousand talents and ten thousand drams of gold, ten thousand talents of silver, eighteen thousand talents of brass, and one hundred thousand talents of iron. And those who had precious stones gave them most willingly, and all the people gave according to their ability, and they gave willingly and cheerfully. That was, indeed, serving the Lord with gladness. Thus they served Him, because they were grateful to Him. David’s exhortation in our text had not been made in vain.

* A talent of gold was worth \$32,805.00, and a talent of silver \$1,883.25. The personal donation of King David in gold and silver alone amounted to \$111,597,750.00. That was an enormous sum of money in those days, when money was worth twenty times as much as it is in our time.

Besides these offerings they brought many sacrifices unto the Lord. At the time Solomon ascended the throne of his father David, the people offered up unto the Lord the following burnt-offerings: a thousand bullocks, a thousand rams, and a thousand lambs. And at the dedication of the Temple Solomon offered a sacrifice of twenty-two thousand oxen, and one hundred and twenty thousand sheep (2 Chron. 7, 5). Truly, in the days of David and Solomon the Israelites served the Lord with gladness, because they wanted to show their gratefulness unto the good and gracious Lord. But in latter days it was altogether different, for then they served Baal and other idols, and not the God who had done so wondrously unto them. In the days of Elijah only seven thousand were left who served the Lord. And in the days of Malachi they said that it were a hard task, and of no benefit, to serve the Lord. The service of the Lord was irksome unto them (Malachi 3). Under such sad and deplorable circumstances it was impossible for them to render cheerful service unto the Lord.

It is the will of the Lord, my beloved fellow-Christians, that we serve Him with gladness. This we can do only when we realize His goodness and loving-kindness towards us and our dear Synod.

I have already enumerated the chief blessings of the good and gracious Lord unto us and our beloved Synod, both temporal and spiritual. Through the means of grace, that is, through His Word and the blessed Sacraments, He has made us His people, and sheep of His pasture. Unto this very day we hear His Word in its truth and purity, and we have the blessed Sacraments unadulterated, for we use them in strict agreement with His words of institution. God has also given us a beautiful and up-to-date school building in which our children are nurtured in the love and fear of the Lord and trained to become conscientious and law abiding citizens of our beloved fatherland. We are enjoying religious and civil liberty to this very day, notwithstanding the sad and most deplorable fact, that many of our fellow-citizens, blindfolded by error and bias, are trying to undermine our American liberties, both civil and religious. There is, indeed, no people in all the wide world that enjoys such blessed liberties and such spiritual and temporal gifts as we do. Oh, that every one of us would realize these blessed facts! Indeed, all of us, who realize the goodness, mercy, and truth which the Lord has granted unto us and our fellow-Christians in this blessed father-

land of ours, cannot do otherwise than serve Him with gladness. Surely, every one of us would be by far worse than the irrational brutes, if he would not be willing to serve such a good, merciful, and truthful Lord, as our Lord is. It is His divine will that *all* of us should serve Him with gladness. We should, however, not only serve Him with our *lips* by songs of praise, but also by our *offerings* for the maintenance and extension of His blessed kingdom throughout the world. Oh, beloved fellow-Christians, serve the Lord with gladness! Let there be no sluggishness in our service unto the good and gracious Lord! In this sanctuary and in our homes let doxologies proceed from our hearts and lips, and free-will offerings of material gifts in abundance be brought unto Him, who has given us everything that we need for time and eternity! Yes, let us serve the Lord with gladness.

Give thanks to God and sing His praise,
Your anthems to His glory raise,
On Him your grateful psalms bestow;
No sweeter joy may Christians know.

His goodness all our day attends,
His loving-kindness never ends,
His boundless grace to us is sure,
His truth forever doth endure.

God Father in the highest throne,
And Jesus Christ, His only Son,
With God the Holy Spirit be
Adored throughout eternity.

Amen.

Second Sunday after Easter.

John 10, 22—28.

And it was at Jerusalem, the Feast of the Dedication,* and it was winter. And Jesus walked in the Temple in Solomon's Porch. Then came the Jews round about Him, and said unto Him, How long dost Thou make us to doubt? If Thou be the Christ, tell us plainly. Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not; the works that I do in My Father's name they bear witness of Me. But ye believe not, because ye are not of My sheep, as I said unto you. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand.

From the chapter preceding our text, we learn that Jesus had defended His deity against a number of Jews, Pharisees and scribes, no doubt, in the Temple-court. As they could not refute His sound arguments, they took up stones in order to stone Him to death. Jesus, however, passed through their midst, and went out of the Temple. Going along the streets of the city, He found a blind beggar, who had been blind from his birth. Jesus had compassion upon him and gave him his sight. That was a great miracle. Some of the people who witnessed this miracle, contended that Jesus must needs be that promised Christ (Messiah); but others argued that He could not be that Promised One, because He had cured the beggar on the Sabbath-day. While the controversy waxed hotter, some one asked the beggar, what he thought about the matter in dispute. He professed that he believed Jesus to be a prophet, no doubt meaning, that great Prophet who was to come. When he had thus professed his belief, he was taken to some Pharisees, and they tried their very best to make him believe that he was mistaken; that Jesus could not be the Christ, but that He must be a sinner, because He had broken the Sabbath. But they could not shake the faith of the beggar, for he said unto them: "Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind. If this Man were not of God, He could do nothing." The Pharisees got very angry at him and cast him out, that is, they

* The Feast of the Dedication was instituted by the Maccabees in remembrance of the purification of the Temple after its profanation by Antiochus Epiphanes. It continued eight days, following the 25th of Cisleu (December). Godet, II, 157.

excommunicated him. When Jesus heard what had been done to him, He looked for him, and when He had found him, He said to him: "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" He answered and said to Jesus: "Who is He, Lord, that I might believe on Him?" Jesus said to him: "Thou hast both seen Him, and it is He that talketh with thee." Then the beggar cried out, saying: "Lord, I believe!" And he worshiped Jesus. Jesus then turned Himself about and said to the whole crowd of people: "For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not, might see; and that they which see, might be made blind." Then some of the Pharisees said unto Him: "Are we blind also?" Jesus said unto them: "If ye were blind, ye should have no sin; but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth." And then He spoke a few parables unto them by which He wished to teach them that they were thieves and robbers of His sheep.

About two months afterwards, at the Feast of the Dedication, Jesus again came to the Temple, and while He was walking in Solomon's Porch, He was surrounded by many Jews, especially Pharisees, who attacked Him, saying: "How long dost Thou make us doubt? If Thou be the Christ (Messiah), tell us plainly." Jesus said unto them: "I told you, and ye believed not; the works that I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me. But ye believe not, because ye are not of My sheep."

These last words of Jesus suggest the important question, Who, then, are His sheep? This question I shall now answer. Jesus is, indeed, the Good Shepherd, but,—

Who Are His Sheep?

I answer,

1. *All those who believingly hear His voice, and*
2. *All those who willingly follow Him.*

1.

"*My sheep hear My voice,*" says Jesus in our text. The hearing of His voice is, therefore, one of the marks of His sheep.

What, then, is the voice of Jesus? What does He Himself understand by His voice? By His voice He means the Word of God, especially the saving Gospel, as we find it recorded in the Bible.

When Jesus sojourned upon this earth, He, as we know from the Bible, preached throughout all the land of Canaan and its borders. All those people, who believingly heard Him, became

His sheep, that is, His disciples. After His sufferings, death, resurrection, and ascension He had His saving Gospel preached by His apostles and other disciples. They were His under-shepherds, true ministers of the Gospel, and all those who believingly heard their Gospel-message, became disciples of Jesus, sheep of the fold of the Good Shepherd. All those, however, who called themselves ministers of the Gospel, but who did not preach Christ and Him crucified, were thieves and robbers, such as the Pharisees and scribes. They tried to steal, rob, yea, kill, the sheep of the Good Shepherd. And all those who believingly heard them were not sheep of Jesus, but rather the goats of the devil. These are facts, my beloved friends, which Jesus Himself has taught; however, they are now being brushed aside by many who call themselves preachers of the Gospel and Christians.

We are accustomed to speak of all churches in our country as *Christian* churches, and of the preachers as *Christian* preachers, but that is altogether wrong, for not all so-called Christian churches are Christian, nor are all so-called preachers of the Gospel Christian preachers. No, very many are unchristian to the very core. Like the Pharisees and scribes, there are very many preachers who have broken into the fold of the Good Shepherd, that is, into truly Christian churches in order to lead the sheep of the Good Shepherd out of His fold; to lead them into eternal perdition. Whether these preachers call themselves Episcopalian or Methodist or Baptist or Presbyterian or Lutheran preachers, it matters not. If they preach not the Word of God in its purity as regards the way to life everlasting, that is, if they preach not unto poor sinners Christ Jesus, then they are thieves and robbers, false prophets, who are stealing and murdering the sheep of the Good Shepherd. And all those people who believingly hear their false doctrines are not sheep of the fold of the Good Shepherd. All the so-called modern theologians, the evolutionists in the pulpits of Christian churches, are destroying many sheep of the Good Shepherd. They are doing more real harm to the Church of Jesus Christ than all the scoffers and atheists ever have done or could do. Men like Fosdick, who calls himself a Baptist minister, and Grant, who claims to be an Episcopalian rector, and many others of their kind, who are preaching their own ideas and notions, and not the Gospel of Jesus Christ, are thieves and robbers, wolves in sheep's clothing, and they are doing by far more harm to the Christian Church

than Voltaire or Bob Ingersoll ever could do. The so-called modern theologians are robbing the Christian people of the Christian fundamentals piece by piece, so that the inexperienced young Christians especially are not at all aware of this soul-robbing business carried on by these evolutionistic preachers.* The modern theologians or evolutionistic preachers deny the verbal inspiration of the Bible, the Virgin-birth and, therefore, the deity of Jesus Christ, His atonement for the sins of the world by His bitter sufferings and death, salvation through faith in Him. They all preach a shallow morality, and tell the people that they can save themselves by their own works and merits. They try to make Christian people believe that they are truly *Christian* preachers, and many Christians believe them, and thus they are being led away from the fold of the Good Shepherd. All people who follow these strangers, these false teachers, are not sheep of the Good Shepherd, not disciples of Jesus Christ, for Jesus says of His sheep, that they hear *His* voice, and not the voice of strangers, of false prophets.

A true Christian will only believingly hear such preachers who preach Christ and Him crucified. A true Christian knows the voice of the Good Shepherd and also the voice of a stranger, and therefore he will shun and avoid all false prophets. A true Christian knows at once whether or not a preacher is preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ, or a false gospel, falsehood. Whenever a true Christian hears a preacher say that the Bible is not the Word of God in all its parts, that Jesus Christ is not the very Son of God, that sinners are not saved only and solely through faith in the Godman Savior of the world, that baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost is not necessary unto salvation, that the contempt of it does not damn, that a Christian need not commune at the Lord's Table, though he is able to examine himself, that it matters not what a person believes just so he believes in some god, — then a true Christian knows at once that such a one is a false prophet, and that he is preaching a wishy-washy Christianity; he knows at once that he is not hearing the voice of the Good Shepherd, but that of a wolf in sheep's clothing, and he will not be deceived. A true Christian

* Doctor Stratton, a Baptist minister, in his *Fundamentalist* appropriately designates them Funny-Monkeyists, because they insist that they are descended from the brute, from monkeys, tree apes, etc.

wants to hear nothing but the voice of the Good Shepherd, that is, the *saving* Gospel of Jesus Christ, and not a *social* gospel which cannot save.

It is said that at one time two shepherds had a serious dispute about a sheep. The true shepherd had to bring suit against the spurious one. Both brought witnesses with them, and also the sheep. The judge was somewhat puzzled as to how to decide the case. Finally he ordered both shepherds to go into a room and call the sheep. At first the false shepherd called, but the sheep did not respond to his call. When the real shepherd of the sheep called it by its name, it at once ran to the door of the room, and tried to get in. The judge hereupon could not fail to pronounce a just judgment. That sheep knew its shepherd by his voice. So it is also with the sheep of the Good Shepherd. Every sheep of His fold, that is, every true believer in Jesus Christ, knows the voice of Jesus from that of strangers, of false prophets. And it is self-evident that a true Christian will follow the Savior, yes, every sheep of the Good Shepherd will follow Him. And of this fact I shall now speak to you in the second place.

2.

Of His sheep Jesus says in our text: "*And they follow Me.*" If any one of us would know whether or not he is a sheep of the Good Shepherd, that is, whether or not he is a true Christian, he must also make sure whether or not he is *following* the voice of Jesus.

We have already heard, beloved friends, that by the voice of Jesus the Word of God is understood. We, therefore, follow His voice, if we believe the Word of God and live according to it.

The Word of God is twofold: *Law and Gospel*. The Law teaches men their sins, and the wrath of God over sin; it condemns all people who transgress it in thoughts, desires, words, and deeds. The Gospel teaches that sinful men, who have transgressed the holy Law of God, and who cannot save themselves, have a divine Savior. That Jesus Christ is that divine Savior; that He, by His bitter sufferings and death has redeemed all sinful men from sin, death, and eternal damnation; that He paid the debt of all sinners with His own precious blood; that He reconciled His Father to sinful men, and that all those who believe this with all their heart, are indeed God's true children, that they are finally eternally saved, because God does not impute unto them their transgressions, but forgives them unto them for

the sake of His only-begotten Son Jesus Christ, for it is written: "God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3, 16.

As soon as a poor sinner believes this Gospel-message, so soon he is also willing to serve his God and Savior by a truly Christian life, — by good works. He will do all he possibly can do for Him, who loved him so. Yes, all those who truly believe in Jesus Christ as in their one and only Savior willingly and cheerfully follow Him.

How is it with you, my beloved friend? Are you following your Good Shepherd? Do you follow Him whenever He calls you? Every time His saving Gospel is preached here in this sanctuary of God, Jesus is here, for He said: "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there I am in the midst of them." Matt. 18, 20. Jesus comes to *every* service that is held here, and whenever the church bells ring, He calls you to come to Him and hear Him. Do you do it? Every time your pastor invites you to donate of your earthly means towards the maintenance and extension of the fold of the Good Shepherd, that is, invites you to support all truly Christian missionary endeavors at home and abroad, it is really your Good Shepherd Himself who is calling for your help. He wants all sinful and lost men to become sheep of His fold. That is the reason why He gave His disciples the command to go out into all the world, and to preach the Gospel to every creature (Mark 16, 15). We Christians must send out missionaries to the pagan world, and we must support them. Jesus also goes to the heathen lands, and He watches your gifts as they follow Him. That is how you can and should follow Him into the heathen countries. Do you do it willingly and cheerfully? Do you give according to your ability so that the fold of your Good Shepherd may be enlarged, the number of His sheep may be increased?

Jesus also goes to the institutions of mercy. Do you follow Him thence with your gifts and prayers for those unfortunate ones who are there? Are you willing to help the poor, the blind, the orphans, the cripples, the forsaken and fallen ones? Are you willing to help that they may hear the voice of the Good Shepherd?

Again, there are certain places where Jesus will *not* go, and where you cannot find Him. Wherever the children of this world,

the goats, come together in order to serve the devil, Jesus cannot be found, for He hates all things which are sinful and evil; He hates sin and all sinful, worldly pleasures. If sinners entice you to go with them to lewd picture-shows and theaters, what do you then do? Do you go with them? If you do, beloved friend, you are going to places where Jesus is not, where He has not gone, and therefore you are not following Him, but the devil. If sinners entice you to go with them to dance-halls and ball-rooms and other places of sinful amusements, what do you then do? Do you go with them? If you do, then you are going to places where Jesus does not go, and you cannot follow Him. Yes, to all places of sinful amusements *Jesus does not go*, and if *you go*, you are not following Him, but the devil. And where will the devil lead you? He will lead you to perdition, to hell. Jesus, and Jesus only, leads His sheep into heaven. O blessed therefore, all those who are and who remain to be His sheep! Of His sheep He says: "*I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand.*"

Let this be our daily supplication:—

Thine forever! God of love,
Hear us from Thy throne above;
Thine forever may we be,
Here and in eternity.

Thine forever! Savior, keep
These Thy frail and trembling sheep!
Save alone beneath Thy care,
Let us all Thy goodness share.

Thine forever! Thou our Guide,
All our wants by Thee supplied,
All our sins by Thee forgiven,
Lead us, Lord, from earth to heaven.

Amen.

Third Sunday after Easter.

Psalm 118, 23—25.

This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it. Save now, I beseech Thee, O Lord! O Lord, I beseech Thee, send now prosperity!

Today we are celebrating the *Diamond Jubilee* of our dear Synod. Our Synod, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and other States, was organized seventy-five years ago in the metropolis of our State, by twenty-two pastors, sixteen congregations and two candidates of theology.

What, then, is a synod? A synod is a union of congregations. For what purposes are synods organized? Synods are organized for the purposes of Christian fellowship, and for doing the work of the Lord with united efforts and strength.

Today we have joined thousands of our sister congregations and mission-stations throughout our native land in the celebration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the organization of our beloved Synod. Why? Not because our Synod had given orders to that effect, for our Synod does not issue such orders; our Synod makes no laws or ordinances for the congregations belonging to it. The only thing our Synod does is, that it accepts only such congregations into its fellowship as adhere strictly to the Confessions of our dear Lutheran Church, or in other words, to the doctrines of the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament. In all matters which are neither enjoined nor prohibited by God's Word, it grants full Christian liberty to every one of its congregations to do as it pleases. The Missouri Synod is the most democratic synod in the world.

Why, then, beloved friends and fellow-Lutherans, do we and more than a million Lutherans in our country, belonging to our Synod, celebrate its organization today? This question I shall now endeavor to answer by the assistance of the Holy Spirit, and in accordance with our text.

Why Do We and Thousands of Our Sister Congregations Celebrate the Diamond Jubilee of Our Synod This Day?

I answer,

1. *Because we want to thank God for the many and great blessings which He has bestowed upon our Synod in the past, and*

2. *Because we want to call upon Him for His assistance in the future.*

1.

The organization of our beloved Synod was an event of great and far-reaching importance to the Lutheran Church in our country. Why? Because it was the first synod organized which was not only *Lutheran in name*, but also strictly *Lutheran in its confession and practise*.

When our Synod was organized on April 26, 1847 (Monday after Jubilate Sunday), there were already 22 synods of the Lutheran Church in our country, aggregating 1,307 congregations, 538 pastors, and 135,629 communicant members; but these synods were not strictly Lutheran. The Rev. John G. Morris, not a member of our Synod, but rather the president of the General Synod, in his book, *Fifty Years in the Lutheran Ministry*, published in 1878, describes the conditions of the Lutheran Church in those days as follows:

"Fifty years ago when there were less than 200 ministers in the Lutheran Church, neither the Augsburg Confession nor any other creed was regarded as obligatory upon them. The large majority of them, however, were orthodox in the usual acceptation of the term; that is, they accepted the evangelical system of Christian doctrine, and a large proportion of them preached it faithfully. But many of them were not strictly Lutheran on the dogma of the Sacraments, or at least did not attach much importance to it. It never was a subject of discussion among them, and hence there was a great diversity of sentiment. . . . They were sturdy Lutherans in name as a party signal, but sadly latitudinarian in their theology. To so little extent was distinctive Lutheran theology discussed that it may, perhaps, surprise some of my readers to learn that in the three volumes of *Das Evangelische Magazin*, the first professedly Lutheran periodical published in this country, the subject of our doctrine on the Sacraments is not even alluded to." (*Ebenezer*, 96.)

How was that possible? Had there been no truly Lutheran pastors in our country at all? Indeed, there had. Among the Lutheran pastors in our beloved country a century before our dear Synod was organized, we find, for example, a man who was truly Lutheran and pious, a great preacher and organizer, namely, the venerable Pastor Henry Melchior Muehlenberg, known as the *Patriarch of the Lutheran Church in America*. Muehlenberg and

many of his associates labored most faithfully, and the Lord blessed their endeavors richly. Why was it, then, that those 22 synods, which existed before the organization of our Synod, were not strictly Lutheran? There are, of course, various reasons for this, but the two chief reasons were these: The Lutherans had given up their Christian or Lutheran schools when the change of language from the German and Swedish to the English had taken place, believing, perhaps, that these were no longer necessary, since the English language was mostly used in the services. They had looked upon their Lutheran schools as *language* schools, and not, as it should have been, as *Christian* schools. Thus a generation grew up that knew little or nothing of true Lutheranism. Furthermore, the Lutherans failed to establish and maintain Lutheran colleges and seminaries. Consequently the men who were sent out to teach and preach the Lutheran doctrine, were unable to do what was expected of them. With few exceptions most of them had received their training in non-Lutheran colleges and seminaries, and, of course, had imbibed the doctrines of the Reformed Churches. It was quite natural, therefore, that they were not distinctively Lutheran in their teaching and preaching, and many of them left the Lutheran Church and associated themselves with the Reformed Churches, especially with the Episcopal Church, because they were of the erroneous opinion that this church was the nearest to the Lutheran in doctrine and practise. Syncretism and indifference, and, therefore, unionism, had supplanted the true Lutheranism of the pious and truly Lutheran fathers.

As the organizers of our Synod were strictly Lutheran, not only in name, but also in their confession and church-policy, they could not join any of the existing synods, for to have done that would have been hypocrisy. For this reason they organized a synod of their own, and as reasons for the organization of a new synod they gave these:

1. The example of the Apostolic Church (Acts 15, 1—15).
2. The conservation and continuance of the unity of the true faith (Eph. 4, 3—16; 1 Cor. 1, 10), and a united effort to resist every form of schism and sectarianism (Rom. 16, 17).
3. The protection of pastors and congregations in the fulfilment of their duties and maintenance of their rights.
4. The endeavor to bring about the largest possible uniform-

be in church practice, church customs, and, in general, in congregational affairs.

5. Our Lord's will that the diversities of gifts should be for the common profit (1 Cor. 12, 4—31).
6. United effort to extend the kingdom of God and to make possible and to promote special aims of the synod (seminary, agenda, Book of Concord, hymn-book, schoolbooks, distribution of the Bible, missionary activities within and without the church, etc.).

Indeed, all were good and valid reasons for the organization of a synod! The fathers were, indeed, eager and determined that our dear Church should grow, but not at the cost of truly Lutheran principles. Conditions of membership were these:

Acceptance of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament as the written Word of God and the only rule and norm of faith and of practice; acceptance of *all* the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as a true and correct statement and expression of the Word of God, to wit, the three Ecumenical Creeds,—the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed,—the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Smalcald Articles, the Large Catechism of Luther, the Small Catechism of Luther, and the Formula of Concord; renunciation of unionism and syncretism of every description, such as, serving congregations of mixed confession as such, as ministers of the church, taking part in the service and sacramental rites of heterodox congregations, or of such of mixed confession, joining the heterodox in missionary efforts, or in the publication and distribution of literature; exclusive use of doctrinally pure agenda, hymn-books and catechism, in church and school, and a Christian school education for the children." (*American Lutheran*, April, 1922.)

But, beloved friends and fellow-Lutherans, did not our fathers make a very grave mistake when they conditioned the fellowship with our Synod upon accepting such orthodox confessions? Could they expect to ever get people to join our Synod? Did they not, by such strict adherence to the written Word of God and the Confessions of our dear Lutheran Church, dig the grave for the synod which they organized? That was the assertion of all lax Lutherans in those days. They made the claim that the Missouri Synod would die in its infancy. But they were false prophets, for their prophecies were not fulfilled. The Missouri Synod began

to grow and prosper from its very inception. It grew more rapidly than any other synod or church-body, and it is still growing to-day. At the end of the year of its birth, in 1847, it numbered 30 pastors, 4,100 souls, and the collections for outside purposes amounted to \$334.00. Today our dear Synod numbers 2,630 pastors and professors, 1,023,150 souls, 1,277 Christian schools, 1,376 school teachers, — also many pastors are teaching —, 73,000 pupils, 15 seminaries and colleges which are now being attended by about 2,300 students, 58 charitable institutions. Last year (1921) the Missouri Synod congregations raised for outside purposes a little over \$4,000,000.00. Indeed, we must confess with the Psalmist of old: *"This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it."* Surely, the Lord has blessed our dear Synod far above all that we can ask or think. We are not at all worthy of all His gracious blessings; we have not deserved them. It is because He is so good and so gracious that we have thus prospered. Therefore, beloved fellow-Lutherans, give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good! Sing doxologies unto Him, for He is deserving of all the praise and thanksgiving which we can render unto Him! Yea, we want to thank God for the manifold and great blessings which He has so graciously bestowed upon our dear Synod in the past! That is the first reason why we today have joined thousands of our sister congregations in the celebration of the Diamond Jubilee of our Synod.

But, beloved fellow-Lutherans, we also celebrate the Diamond Jubilee of our Synod this day, because we want to call upon God for His gracious help in the future. And of this I shall now speak to you in the second place.

2.

The Psalmist prayed unto the Lord, crying out: *"Save now, I beseech Thee, O Lord! O Lord, I beseech Thee, send now prosperity!"* I trust, my beloved fellow-Lutherans, that every one of you will join the Psalmist in this supplication. The Lord, who has so wondrously blessed us and our Synod during the last seventy-five years, must do it in the future. If He will not bless us, we cannot prosper. If we have His gracious help, however, we shall not be put to shame.

Our Synod holds to the very same doctrines, and teaches and preaches them in their purity and entirety, which her founders taught and preached seventy-five years ago. This is something

extraordinary; unusual; wonderful. Look at the different church denominations round about us, my beloved friends, and you will see that they do not proclaim the same doctrines now which they proclaimed a generation ago. A few decades ago almost all of the different church denominations in our country taught that the Bible is the inspired Word of God; but nowadays most of them teach that the Bible only *contains* God's Word. Higher Criticism has wrought havoc with most Protestant churches the world over. Human thought and sciences, falsely so called, are now being generally proclaimed from so-called Christian pulpits. A very decided change for the worse has taken place in many churches in regard to doctrine and church-polity. This is true also of many so-called Lutheran congregations and synods in our country. Missouri Synod Lutherans have the very same flesh and blood that others have. This fact we cannot deny. We must meet the very same dangers which others had to meet, and we may fall, as they have fallen. Oh, how necessary, therefore, that every one of us should pray with the Psalmist in our text: "*Save now, I beseech Thee, O Lord! O Lord, I beseech Thee, send now prosperity!*"

Some years ago an opponent of our Synod called our Synod the conscience of the Lutheran Church. Is that true even today? I believe that it is, but what of the future? Do we not meet with Missouri Synod people who seem to have a very wide conscience in regard to many things? Have we not such as think lightly of God's Word and the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and who long for something new? Have we not such in our Synod as say that our Synod must change her attitude toward unionism and secretism (lodges), if she would gain new members? Indeed, we meet with such people in our Synod, and I am afraid that their number is larger than we suppose. Surely, we have all reasons in the world to join the Psalmist in our text, praying: "*Save now, I beseech Thee, O Lord! O Lord, I beseech Thee, send now prosperity!*"

From the very beginning of our Synod to this day we have enjoyed civil and religious liberty, freedom of conscience. How about the future? Are the foundations of our civil and religious liberties as secure today, as they were seventy-five years ago? This no one will assert who has open eyes and open ears. There are many unchristian and un-American forces at work in our beloved country which threaten to undermine our civil and religious freedom. During the last decade the foundations of our liberties,

civil as well as religious, were severely shaken. Why do some of our greatest statesmen lift up their voices in defense of civil and religious liberty? Why do they do it? Because they see the great danger which is awaiting our people. Yes, indeed, we are in great danger of losing our liberties. Under the guise of patriotism sham-Americans and worshipers of the almighty dollar are doing all within their power to wrest from us the blessed heritage, which our fathers have left us. Indeed, my beloved fellow-Lutherans and fellow-citizens, we have all reasons in the world to pray with the Psalmist of old: *"Save now, I beseech Thee, O Lord! O Lord, I beseech Thee, send now prosperity!"* Indeed, we must look to God for help. We must implore Him for His assistance in the future.

Let us, then, not only be glad and praise God for the manifold and great blessings which He so graciously has bestowed upon us, our dear Synod, and our native land, but let us also implore Him with all our heart that He, in lovingkindness for Jesus Christ's sake, be gracious unto us in the future! We can be sure that He will hear our prayers, for He Himself has commanded us to pray, and has promised to hear us. Every day of our lives let us, then, join in fervent prayer with the Christian poet, saying:—

Lord God, who art my Father dear,
We pray in Jesus' name: O hear
What, trusting in His promised Word,
I humbly ask of Thee, good Lord.

Grant us Thy Word, Thy Spirit give,
That by His grace we godly live,
Give shelter, peace, good friends, and food,
Protect our native land, O God.

Save us from sin and Satan's fraud,
Deliver us from evil, God,
Be with us in our dying hour;
Thine is the kingdom, glory, power.

Amen.

Fourth Sunday after Easter.

John 16, 7—11.

It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you. And when He is come, He will reprove the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment: of sin, because they believe not on Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father, and ye see me no more; of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.

Our text is taken from the parting words of Jesus to His apostles. The time had come in which He was to be delivered up to the cross for the sins of mankind. After His ignominious death on the accursed tree of the cross He was to rise again from His grave, and then go back to His Father in heaven, from whence He had come to save a lost sinner-world.

Jesus tells His disciples that it were expedient for them that He should go back to His Father after His great work of redemption had been finished, for if He would not go back, so He assures them, the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, would not be sent unto them; but if He had ascended up, He would send the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, unto them, and He would lead them into all truth, and thus He would comfort them in all their sorrows, and glorify Jesus in their heart.

What Jesus promised unto His disciples was all literally fulfilled. And His promise is still being fulfilled to this very day. The Holy Spirit to this very day teaches all Christians and comforts them, and thus He glorifies Jesus in their heart, or, as Luther so well says in his explanation of the Third Article: "He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith: in which Christian Church He daily and richly forgives all sins to me and all believers, and will at the last day raise up me and all the dead, and give unto me and all believers in Christ eternal life."

But, beloved friends, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, does more. He also reprove the unbelieving and self-righteous world. And of what does He reprove the world? This question Jesus Himself answers in our text. In accordance with the same, and by the assistance of the Holy Spirit, let us now hear the answer which Jesus Himself gives to the important question:

Of What Does the Holy Spirit Reprove the World?

Jesus answers,

1. *Of sin, because they believe not on Me.*
2. *Of righteousness, because I go to My Father.*
3. *Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.*

1.

Jesus tells His apostles concerning the reproof of the Holy Spirit: "*And when He is come, He will reprove the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment: of sin, because they believe not on Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father, and ye see Me no more; of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.*"

When Jesus says, that the Holy Spirit reproves or convicts the *world*, He, of course, does not refer to the physical world, but rather to the unbelieving and self-righteous people living in this physical world.

It is true, even people who do not believe in Jesus Christ, admit that they are sinners. They say, "Indeed, we are sinners, for all men are sinful, even the saints are not sinless." Unbelievers admit that they are sinners, because their own conscience tells them that they are sinful. Their conscience tells them this, because the Law of God is written in their heart (Rom. 2, 14, 15).

The greatest of all sins, however, the only sin which condemns, the unbelievers and many of those who call themselves Christians, do not consider a sin at all. And it is especially of this sin on account of which the Holy Spirit reproves the world. Which sin is this? Jesus says in our text: "*Because they believe not on Me.*" That is the cardinal sin. But this fact the unbelievers do not accept. They will not believe that it is the greatest of all sins, if people will not believe that Jesus of Nazareth is in deed and in truth the very Son of God and the Redeemer of mankind. They will tell you, that people, of course, must believe in God, in a Supreme Being, otherwise they could not be eternally saved. But all those who do not believe in the Son of God, in Jesus Christ, and in Him that sent Him into this world to save sinful men, and in the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son, or in other words, all those who do not believe in the Triune God, believe in an idol. The Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, is the only true God. Without faith in Him no one can be eternally saved. When, for example,

the Israelites in the wilderness made themselves a golden calf and worshiped it as God, they did not worship God, but an idol. Or when the Ten Tribes worshiped Baal, and declared him to be God, they did not worship God, but an idol. And thus it is to this very day. People who do not believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and who do not honor Him as God's Son, are not worshiping God, but an idol; for it is written: "All men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father which hath sent Him." John 5, 23. And again it is written: "The Father loved the Son, and hath given all things into His hand. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." John 3, 35. 36.

All those who hear the Gospel preached unto them and do not believe in Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit reproves on account of their unbelief. Such and similar thoughts come to him who does not believe in Jesus: Perhaps Jesus is the true Son of God and the only Savior of mankind. If He is, then all those cannot be saved who will not accept Him by faith. If Jesus Christ is really the Savior, then I, so the unbeliever must tell himself, have no Savior, unless I accept Jesus Christ. Such and similar thoughts that come to an unbeliever who hears a Gospel-sermon, are pressed into his heart by the Holy Spirit. Thus He reproves every one who does not accept Jesus Christ as the Son of God and as the only Savior of sinful mankind. And ever and anon the Holy Spirit pricks the conscience of every one who does not accept Jesus Christ by true faith as his Savior.

It is, indeed, true that many hearers of the Gospel harden their hearts against such reproving testimony of the Holy Spirit, and are eternally lost. Woe unto them! It were much better for them, if they in their lives never would have heard of Jesus Christ and His work of redemption, for their damnation will be much more severe than the damnation of those who never heard the Gospel.

But, on the other hand, it cannot be denied that many, who hear the Gospel, will also accept it and be eternally saved. Thus the Holy Spirit does not reprove the world in vain. And blessed every one, who does not harden his heart against the operations of the Holy Spirit! Blessed, forever blessed, every one who will abandon the greatest of all sins, the only damning sin, namely,

unbelief in Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God and the only Savior of men!

But, my dear friends, Jesus does not only say that the Holy Spirit reproves the world on account of the sin, that they not believe on Him, but also, in the second place, on account of their own righteousness. Of this I shall now speak to you.

2.

Just as all rational and upright men will admit that they are sinners, just so they will also admit that they must have a certain righteousness, if they would be eternally saved. But what kind of a righteousness do those consider necessary, who do not believe in Jesus Christ? It is self-righteousness, their own righteousness. All those who do not accept Jesus as their Savior, believe that they can merit eternal life by their own works and goodness. They believe that they will be eternally saved, if they abstain from the coarse outbursts against the divine Law. They believe that, if they shun all manner of gross sins and vices, such as blasphemy, murder, adultery, robbery, perjury, drunkenness, and if they lead honorable lives before men, they will be saved. They trust in themselves, like that Pharisee, of whom Jesus says that he went up to the Temple to pray, and that he thanked God because he was such a good and pious man; not as wicked as so many others, especially,—the publican, who also went up to the Temple to pray. Their righteousness is essentially the very same righteousness of which the Pharisee boasted. But self-righteousness is not that righteousness which saves a sinner. Man's own righteousness, so the Prophet Isaiah says, is as a filthy rag before God. As long as a sinner trusts in his own righteousness, that is, as long as he hopes to be eternally saved, because he is not as wicked as many others are, because he abstains from committing gross sins and leads an outwardly honorable and decent life in this world, so long he cannot be saved, because his righteousness is worthless before the holy and just God. And this he must learn to realize. And that is the reason why the Holy Spirit reproves him on account of his trust in his own worthless righteousness. Therefore Jesus says in our text of the Holy Spirit: *"And when He is come, He will reprove the world...of righteousness, because I go to the Father."*

This is a most remarkable saying of Jesus, my beloved friends. What does He mean to say, when He says, that the Holy Spirit will reprove the world on account of righteousness,

because He goes to His Father? Does He mean to say that the Holy Spirit reproves a man, because he abstains from gross sins and vices, and because he leads an honorable life in this world? Surely not. Jesus means to say that the Holy Spirit reproves men, because they trust in themselves or, because they believe that they can save themselves by their own merits. He reproves them, because they do not rely upon and trust in that righteousness which avails before God, that is, in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Jesus suffered and died, and He rose again and ascended into heaven, in order to save sinful mankind. By His work of redemption He has reconciled all men to His Father. And if they accept Him as their Redeemer, then the heavenly Father will look upon them, as though they had done what Jesus did for them. The righteousness which avails before God is the righteousness of Jesus Christ, which a sinner secures through faith in Jesus. This righteousness is perfect. The going of Jesus to His Father was conclusive evidence for the fact that the righteousness which avails before God the Father has been established for all sinners. Therefore the Holy Spirit reproves all self-righteous people, that is, all who rely and trust in their own righteousness. He testifies unto them, that sinful men can be saved only when they accept that righteousness which Jesus Christ has established, and that all those, who reject Jesus and His righteousness must be eternally lost.

Of course, many self-righteous people do not listen to this reproving testimony of the Holy Spirit, they continue to trust in their own worthless righteousness; they contend that they can save themselves by their imperfect works, and — they are eternally lost. Woe, eternal woe, unto all who trust in themselves, for they build their trust upon sinking sand, and when the storm of death overtakes them, and the waters of despair come upon them, they will realize that they have built their hopes of salvation on no solid foundation, and they will sink into the abyss of hell.

But blessed, forever blessed, all those, who rely and trust in Jesus' blood and righteousness! When they must go through the dark valley of the shadow of death, they can truthfully and cheerfully say with the Psalmist: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me." Ps. 23, 4.

The Holy Spirit also reproves the world on account of judg-

ment, because this prince of the world is judged. Of this I shall now add a few remarks in the third place.

3.

All unbelieving and self-righteous people have a prince who rules over them. This prince is the devil. But he is a conquered prince. Jesus Christ, the almighty Savior, has overcome him. Jesus overcame the prince of this world by His bitter sufferings and death, and by His glorious resurrection and ascension. The prince of this world is, therefore, already judged. The judgment pronounced upon him is eternal damnation. All unbelieving and self-righteous people are servants of the devil. If they will not renounce him and accept Jesus then, beloved friends, there is absolutely no hope for them whatever, for what can a vanquished prince do for his adherents? What, for example, can emperors, kings, and princes do for their people, if they have been conquered? Nothing whatsoever. Thus it is with the prince of this world, the devil and his adherents. There is absolutely no hope for any sinful man to be eternally saved, unless he goes to Jesus Christ, the Conquerer.

This divine fact the Holy Spirit impresses upon the hearts of all those who do not accept Jesus and His righteousness, who do not put their trust in Jesus and His work of redemption. This the Holy Spirit does through the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen Savior of the world. It is true, the unbelieving and self-righteous do not like to give an ear to this reproving testimony of the Holy Spirit, but facts are stubborn things. The prince of this world is already judged; he is doomed. All those who accept him as their prince, are judged and doomed with him. That is what Jesus means when He says of the Holy Ghost in our text: "*And when He is come, He will reprove the world...of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.*"

The conqueror dictates the peace-terms. What, then, are the terms which Jesus offers to the vanquished world, that is, to those who willingly served the prince of this world, and went down with him in defeat? This is a most important question. Which is the correct answer? Listen! Jesus says that His peace-terms are these: that He will accept those sinners, who will acknowledge their sinfulness and their utter incapability to save themselves from sin, death, and damnation, and come to Him

with a penitent and believing heart, that is, who will trust in His gracious mercy and divine love. O wonderful peace-terms! Jesus does not insist on payment of any indemnities; He does not require any reparations to be made by the vanquished. His peace-terms may be summed up in this one lonely sentence: "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Matt. 11, 28.

What then, my beloved friends, are you going to do,—you, who have not accepted Jesus as your one and only Savior up to this present time? Or, if you ever did acknowledge Him as the very Son of God and your Savior, have now deserted Him, and have gone over to the ranks of the conquered and judged enemies of Jesus? Are you going to deny Him, who has bought you with a precious price, that is, with His holy and precious blood? Tell me, my friends, *will* you, *can* you deny Him, the mighty Conqueror and Vanquisher over Satan and his kingdom? God forbid, that you should do that! Go to Him this very day, and join the ranks of the true believers, the disciples of the great Victor, and gratefully and cheerfully accept the peace-terms which He holds out to you! Oh, how blessed you will then be in time and in eternity!

And all of you, who truly acknowledge Jesus as your only Savior, cling to Him in life and in death, honor and serve Him with grateful and cheerful hearts! Then, my dear fellow-Christians, you will be eternally saved, for it is written: "God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved." John 3, 16. 17. God grant unto every one of us true faith in Jesus Christ, the great Conqueror over sin, death, and the devil, and thus save us! Amen.

Fifth Sunday after Easter.

John 16, 23. 24.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in My name. Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.

Communication with God is one of the chief characteristics of God's children. They must pray. In all ages the dear children of God have conversed with Him,—they have prayed.

The Israelites prayed while they were in bondage in Egypt, and God answered their prayers. Moses prayed, and the waters of the Red Sea divided. Elijah prayed, and it rained not for three and a half years; and he again prayed, and there were abundant rains. Daniel prayed while he was in the lions' den, and God saved him from the attacks of these terrible beasts, which otherwise would have devoured him. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego prayed when they had been cast in the fiery furnace, and the fires could not even singe their hair. The Christians at Jerusalem prayed, and they were saved from the frightful atrocities perpetrated in its final destruction. Luther prayed, and the Church was liberated from the tyranny of Antichrist. Yea, all proper prayers that have ever been addressed to the true God, the Triune God, have been answered, and they always will be heard and answered by Him in His own good time and as it is best for His praying children.

During the old dispensation God's children prayed to Jehovah, as He had revealed Himself to the patriarchs; to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Thus also the disciples of Jesus had prayed; therefore Jesus said unto them: "*Hitherto ye have asked nothing in My name.*" But with the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus the new dispensation began, and with it—the *prayer in Jesus' name*. This fact the dear Lord discloses to His beloved disciples in our text when He says to them: "*Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it you.*" If, then, beloved friends, those prayers are heard and answered by the Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ which are made in Jesus' name, then it must be of the greatest importance to every one of us to know what constitutes a prayer in Jesus' name. Let me, then, with the aid

of the Holy Spirit, and in accordance with our text, now answer the important question:

When Do Men Pray in Jesus' Name?

I answer,

1. *If they trust in the person and work of Jesus;*
2. *If they pray in the spirit and mind of Jesus.*

1.

Explorers and historians tell us that all the various peoples on this earth, even the savage tribes, have some kind of religion, and that they pray. It is, therefore, human to offer up some kind of prayers to the Deity. But we Christians know from the Word of God that all prayers that are not made to the true God, the Triune God, who has revealed Himself as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, are not prayers in the true sense of the word. All prayers not made to the true God are made to an idol, and they are idolatry.

But, beloved friends, many prayers are perhaps meant to be addressed to the true God, and yet they are nothing but idolatry, because they are not made in a proper, a God-pleasing manner. Many people who call themselves Christians, and who want to be true Christians, trust in themselves when they pray, and for that very reason they are not heard nor answered by God. People that trust in themselves are like that Pharisee of whom Jesus says: "The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself: God, I thank Thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess." In what did this Pharisee put his trust? In himself, in his own person and work. He expected to have his prayers answered by God because he was so good. That is exactly the way so many pray in our days. And they expect an answer to their prayers because outwardly they lead a respectable life, because they do not live in all kinds of shame and vice, and because they help their fellows when they are in need of their help. They consider themselves angels in men's clothing, and for that reason they think that it is God's duty to hear and answer their prayers. If God does not come up to their expectations, they murmur against Him, because to their notions He is not attending to His business.

Again, many others are like the priests of Baal in the days of the Prophet Elijah, who expected an answer to their prayers

because they suffered so much from self-inflicted wounds. How often will not people say, "God will surely hear our prayers because we must undergo so many sufferings, trials, hardships, and tribulations." All such people rely and trust in themselves; they are worshipping themselves.

On the other hand, many others put their trust in other people. They want God to answer their prayers because they have had, or yet have, such pious parents, brothers, sisters, and friends. Yea, many put their trust in some departed saints. They will call on the Virgin Mary and others, will even revere the bones and bonnets of real or supposed saints, in order that they might make intercessions in their behalf with God. But God says: "Cursed be the man that trusteth in man." Jer. 17, 5. Those who trust in other men, be they dead or alive, are idolaters, and it is self-evident that God cannot answer their prayers. All such do not trust in the person and work of Jesus, — they do not pray in Jesus' name.

Those only pray in Jesus' name who trust in the person and work of Jesus Christ. To His disciples the Lord says in our text: *"Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in My name. Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full."* Jesus tells them that they had not prayed in His name up to that time. The work of redemption had not as yet been finished; for Jesus had not as yet suffered and died for the sins of mankind, and therefore they had not prayed in His name. But in the future His disciples were to pray in His name, that is, they were to pray as men who put their trust in Jesus of Nazareth and His work of redemption. To pray in Jesus' name therefore means neither more nor less than to put one's trust in Jesus and His redeeming work. A man who prays in Jesus' name expects God to give an ear to his prayer and answer it, because Jesus Christ, the Godman Savior of the world, has reconciled God to all men. A man who prays in Jesus' name does not trust in himself nor in his own works, but in Jesus Christ, in Jesus' blood and righteousness. Why does he not trust in his own works and righteousness? Because he knows that his own works and righteousness are as filthy rags before God (Is. 64, 6); he knows that there is no good thing in him, that is, in his flesh (Rom. 7, 18); he knows that he was shapen in iniquity, and that his mother conceived him in sin (Ps. 51, 5); that, therefore, his

imagination is evil from his youth (Gen. 8, 21). He knows, furthermore, that he often has transgressed the Law of God in his thoughts, words, and deeds, and that he has deserved God's wrath and condemnation. But he who prays in Jesus' name knows more than that he is a great sinner; for he also knows that he has a Savior from sin, and that Jesus is that Savior. He knows that Jesus is the end of the Law to every one that believeth in Him (Rom. 10, 4); that God made Jesus to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor. 5, 21); that Jesus is the propitiation for our sins (1 John 2, 3); that Jesus is the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world (John 1, 29); that Jesus was wounded for our transgressions, and that He was bruised for our iniquities (Is. 53, 5); that the work of redemption is finished (John 19, 30); that salvation is accomplished through the sufferings, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. Because a true Christian knows this, therefore he takes courage to go to God with his prayers. And his prayers are acceptable to God, and heard for Jesus' sake, as Jesus says in our text: *"Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it you."* Since the passion, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus is an accomplished fact, we have direct access to the throne, yea, to the heart of the Father of our Savior Jesus Christ. If we pray in Jesus' name, then our prayers are heard and answered by the Father in heaven for Jesus' sake. Every prayer, however, that is not made in Jesus' name, not made in true faith resting in the person and work of Jesus, is of no avail; for God does not answer it. Without Jesus, God is a consuming fire; but with Jesus He is our loving Father.

If a man prays in Jesus' name, he will not only trust in the person and work of Jesus, but he will also pray in the spirit and mind of Jesus Christ. And of this fact I shall now speak to you in the second place.

2.

St. Paul says by inspiration of God: "If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of His." Rom. 8, 9. He wishes to say: Every one that is a true Christian is Christ-minded. That is surely true. For how could any man be a disciple of Jesus if his mind be not fashioned after Christ's mind? A mind contrary to that of Christ is antichristian.

Prayers that are not in accord with the mind and spirit of Jesus, cannot be heard and answered by His Father. What is not pleasing unto the Son of God is not pleasing unto the Father; for Jesus and His Father are of one mind. When Jesus says in our text: "*Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it you,*" He surely does not want to say that His Father will answer our prayers if we do not pray according to His will. God has revealed His will to man in His Word. If any man's prayer is not in conformity with the Word of God, then it is contrary to God's will, and it is not in harmony with the spirit and mind of Jesus Christ. The Bible cites some examples of prayers that were contrary to the revealed Word of God, and, therefore, also contrary to the will of Jesus and His Father in heaven. Matthew gives us an example of this kind. He says: "Then came to Him (Jesus) the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshiping Him, and desiring a certain thing of Him. And He said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto Him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on Thy right hand, and the other on the left, in Thy kingdom. But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto Him, We are able. And He saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of My cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with, but to sit on My right hand and on My left hand is not Mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of My Father." Matt. 20, 20—23. Salome, the wife of Zebedee, the mother of the apostles James and John, at the time when she made this prayer, had a different mind than the humble Jesus, for she was high-minded, and given to vaingloriousness. Her prayer was foolish. God the Father does not answer such foolish prayers.

And on another occasion James and John, the sons of Zebedee and Salome, wished to destroy a whole village in Samaria because the villagers denied a night's lodging unto them and Jesus. They said to the Lord: "Lord, wilt Thou that we command fire to come down from heaven and consume them? But He turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. And they went to another village." Luke 9, 54—56. If James and John had prayed for the conver-

sion of these semi-heathen Samaritans, and not for their destruction, then they would have prayed in the spirit and mind of Jesus; for He prayed for His crucifiers, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Luke 23, 34. We know, my dear friends, that James and John in later years prayed in Jesus' name, that they were of one mind and spirit with Him.

If a man prays in Jesus' name, he will do as Jesus did: He will always submit himself to God's will. Jesus never prayed against the will of His Father. In the garden of Gethsemane, for example, being in great agony, He prayed: "O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt. Thy will be done." Matt. 26, 39. If we want God to hear and answer our prayers, then, most beloved fellow-Christians, we must always submit ourselves to His will as it is revealed to us in the Word of God. The Holy Scriptures teach us to ask God for the gift of the Holy Spirit, for true faith in Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of sins for Jesus' sake, for endurance in true faith to our end; in short, for all spiritual blessings that are necessary for our eternal salvation. And all spiritual blessings, if we pray for them in Jesus' name, will be given to us, for they always tend to the glory of God and our well-being. For spiritual blessings we should pray without any conditions whatever, except that we ask for them in Jesus' name. All other gifts, all temporal blessings, we should ask God to grant us for Jesus' sake, if they tend to His glory and our benefit, that is, with the condition, "If it be Thy will. Thy will be done!"

If we pray thus, we pray in a proper, a God-pleasing manner, and we may be sure that our prayers will be answered by God; for He Himself has commanded us so to pray, and has promised to hear us. God must keep His promises, because He cannot lie. If anything is certain, then this is certain that all prayers in Jesus' name — all prayers which we make trusting in Jesus and His work of redemption, and which are in conformity with His mind and spirit — will be answered by God in His own way and at His appointed time.

May God grant us His Holy Spirit, that we may always pray in Jesus' name; for then our prayers will be heard and answered, and we can then jubilantly cry out in exultation with a Christian poet, saying and singing,

O joy! my hope and trust are founded
On His sure Word, and witness in the heart;
I know Thy mercies are unbounded,
And all good gifts Thou freely wilt impart,
Nay, more is lavished by Thy bounteous hand
Than I can ask, or seek, or understand.

O bliss! in Jesus' name I've tendered
My prayer; He pleads at Thy right hand for me.
Yea and Amen in Him is rendered
What I in faith and spirit ask of Thee.
O joy for me! and praise be ever Thine
Whose wondrous love has made such blessings mine!
Amen.

Ascension Day.

Luke 24, 50—53.

And He led them out as far as to Bethany. And He lifted up His hands and blessed them. And it came to pass, while He blessed them, He was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshiped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and were continually in the Temple, praising and blessing God.

St. Augustine, the foremost among the early church fathers, declares that the festival of the Ascension of our Savior, which we are again observing today, was already celebrated by the apostles and early Christians. It ought not sound strange to us to hear that they commemorated that memorable event. The ascension of our Lord into heaven was, indeed, one of the most wonderful events that ever took place, and it proved to be one of the most comforting incidents recorded in the Bible. Surely, then, it was to be expected that the holy apostles, who witnessed it, would be the very first to observe the anniversary of this glorious and wonderful act with grateful and joyous hearts.

For a period of three years the apostles had been in the company of Jesus. During that triennium Jesus had indoctrinated them in His teachings and prepared them for the holy office of the apostleship. Those years with Jesus,—O what blessed years they were! How often during that time they had heard from His lips most wonderful and comforting teachings which He proclaimed unto them in His sermons and addresses! How often had it been their sacred privilege to witness with their own eyes the many great miracles which He performed! And had they not in those blessed days fully experienced the riches of His love and devotion to them?

It is true, Jesus had been crucified and He had died on the accursed tree of the cross, and two of His followers, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, had taken His remains from the cross and laid them away in Joseph's new sepulcher! However, on the third day, He had come forth out of the grave as the mighty victor over death and the devil, and during the forty days after His resurrection He had appeared to His disciples at least ten times at various places, talking, eating, and drinking with them. To His happy disciples it seemed a foregone conclusion that He would now establish a great earthly kingdom

and ascend the throne of David at Jerusalem. But Jesus suddenly shattered all such carnal hopes of His disciples on the fortieth day after His glorious resurrection by visibly ascending to heaven, and thereby withdrawing His *visible* presence from them.

What may have been the feelings of His disciples after Jesus had withdrawn His visible presence from them? Did they become melancholy and sorrowful? Were they overwhelmed with grief and sadness? Did they bewail and lament His departure? One might expect that, for when He had told them of His going back to His Father their hearts became sorrowful. But not so now! They experienced no sorrow, but they rather rejoiced over His ascension. Accordingly, they commemorated His glorious ascension annually with great joy and gladness.

Like the disciples and early Christians we, too, annually observe the festival of our Lord's glorious ascension with great joy. How is that possible? Jesus withholds His visible presence from us and yet we are not sad, but rejoice. Why do we Christians rejoice over His ascension? It is this question which we shall now consider. In accordance with our text, and by the gracious assistance of the Holy Spirit, I shall now answer the important question:

Why May We and All True Christians Rejoice Over the Ascension of Our Dear Savior?

I answer,

1. *Because our dear Savior, though invisibly, is now always with us, and*
2. *Because in heaven we shall always be with Him and behold Him face to face.*

1.

That the apostles and disciples of Jesus greatly rejoiced over His ascension, is a matter of established record; for we read in our text: "*And He led them out as far as to Bethany. And He lifted up His hands and blessed them. And it came to pass, while He blessed them, He was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshiped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and were continually in the Temple, praising and blessing God.*"

We are justified in asking, How did it happen, what caused the disciples to rejoice and to refrain from becoming melancholy

when Jesus departed from them and ascended into heaven? Had He not always bestowed His love and friendship upon them? Had they not received many kind gifts and favors from Him? Had He not rescued them from many dangers of body and soul? Had He not at all times been so kind and so lovable unto them? Indeed, He had. And now He departed from them for the rest of their lives; they could never again see Him while they lived in this world. But, nevertheless, they were not at all sad; no, they were exceedingly happy, and they "returned to Jerusalem with great joy, praising and blessing God." How was that possible? Do we not, as a rule, bewail the departure of a dear friend? Of course, we do. When the Apostle St. Paul said farewell to the elders or pastors of the Ephesian church their hearts were sorrowful and they shed many tears, because they would not see him again during their lives on earth. But in our text we are told that, when Jesus departed from His disciples and ascended into heaven, they were not sad, they did not weep and lament, but they were happy and sang songs of praise and joy. How are we to explain their actions? Where are we to find the key to this mystery?

The Evangelist St. Matthew offers us the correct solution. He tells us that on a mountain in Galilee, before Jesus ascended into heaven, He revealed Himself to His disciples, and said unto them: "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." Up to this time the disciples had taken a wrong view, had held false notions, of Christ's kingdom. In the first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles St. Luke tells us that the apostles had asked Jesus: "Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom of Israel?" They thought that Jesus would establish a temporal or earthly kingdom and rule it after the manner of mighty earthly kings. But the ascension of Jesus opened their eyes. Now it became very clear to them that Jesus is not an earthly, but a spiritual king, and that His is not a temporal, but an eternal kingdom. Now it dawned upon them what Jesus had meant when He told them that He would go to His Father, and they realized the great benefit and blessing Jesus had secured for them by His going to His Father. Yes, now they understood the real significance of Christ's promise: "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." Now they firmly believed that, although Jesus withdrew His visible presence from them, He would, nevertheless, always be with them, that He would be and remain

with each one of them unto the end of the world. Like blind men whose sight has been restored they see the truth and come to the conclusion: In Christ we have a true, omnipotent, and omniscient Lord and King. He is sitting at the right hand of the Father, that is, with divine majesty and power He rules and fills all things, and especially governs and protects His Church, of which He is the Head. Yes, they finally believed: Jesus, our Lord and Savior, is with us always to the end of the world. No one is able to harm us without His knowledge and consent. He will protect us against all our enemies. And, finally, according to the promise of the angels, He will come again and take us unto Himself in heaven, so that we may be with Him forevermore.

It was this blessed knowledge, my beloved friends, which filled the hearts of the disciples with gladness on the day of His ascension. It made it impossible for them to become melancholy, and compelled them to be happy and to rejoice in the Lord. And thus it is with all true Christians even today. To the present time all true Christians rejoice over the glorious ascension of their Savior. Their joy and happiness is based on the certain knowledge that their ascended Lord is to them what He was to His disciples, namely, their Lord and King who will never leave them. To us and all true Christians the promise is given: "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." Just as surely as the Lord kept His promise to His disciples, so surely He will also keep it to us.

"Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." We, too, believe in, and rely upon that precious promise. We experience its truthfulness in our daily lives. In His State of Exaltation, in which He is now living, He is nearer to us than He was to His disciples during the time of His sojourn upon earth, when He was living in His State of Humiliation. During the time He lived in His State of Humiliation He was present only at one place at the same time according to His body, but now, in His State of Exaltation, He is present everywhere also according to His body. We believe that in the Sacrament of the Altar we receive His true body and blood in, with, and under the consecrated bread and wine. Though invisible, He is truly present with us according to both natures. In proof of this our faith we point to the fact that we still have His Word and Sacraments in their purity and entirety. If Christ were not

present with His Christians, that is, His Church, the Church would have been destroyed long, long ago. The reason that the Church still exists, and that not even the gates of hell have prevailed against it is because the King of all kings, the ascended Savior, is with it; because He upholds, rules, and protects it with divine power.

Should we, then, beloved friends, not have sufficient cause to rejoice over the glorious ascension of our dear Savior into heaven? Yes, indeed, we have every reason to rejoice, for we know that Jesus, in His State of Exaltation, although invisibly, is, nevertheless, present with His Church to the end of the world.

But we have another very important reason why we can rejoice over His ascension, because we know that, by virtue of Christ's ascension, we, too, shall ascend into heaven and be and remain with Him to all eternity. Then we shall behold Him face to face. In heaven He no longer will be invisible to us. Of this blessed fact I shall now speak to you in the second place.

2.

As the meaning of Christ's promise, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world," did not become clear to the disciples until the day of the ascension of the Savior, so it likewise was with other precious promises they had received previously. When He had announced His going to the Father to them, He had also said to them: "Where I am, there shall also My servant be." John 12, 26. "I go to prepare a place for you." John 14, 2. But at that time the disciples did not comprehend the meaning of those precious promises. Thomas, for example, speaking for all of them, said: "Lord, we know not whither Thou goest; and how can we know the way?" John 14, 5. It was due to their lack of comprehension that their hearts were sad and troubled that time. But how different they felt on the day of His ascension into heaven! On that day they realized that Jesus was going up in order to take His seat of glory in the heavens, to return in great glory to His heavenly Father; it was then that it became clear to them that the place He went to prepare for them was their heavenly abode in the life eternal, so that they might be with Him in heaven forever. What blessed assurance and comfort they found in the words of the two angels who said unto them: "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus which is taken up from you into heav-

en, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven." Acts 1, 11. It was now their firm belief and conviction that they were to see Him in heaven, and never again become separated from Him. It was this firm faith which filled their hearts to overflowing with inexpressible joy and happiness, hence they returned to Jerusalem with great joy, praising and blessing God.

It is, indeed, true that they experienced many heart-aches, suffered much tribulation, before they were permitted to ascend into heaven and occupy the places of honor prepared for them by their ascended Savior; they still had to go through a good deal of trouble and temptation; there was yet in store for them a great amount of hatred and persecution on the part of unbelievers and godless men. However, their hearts were again comforted and received new strength and joy, because they relied on the precious promises of their dear Lord and Savior, and confidently believed: The Lord will return and take us with Him into heaven, where we shall remain with Him to all eternity.

The disciples of Jesus have given us and all Christians an excellent example to follow. Human nature has not changed since that time. The devil, the world, and our sinful flesh try to lead us into the same pitfalls of sin in the twentieth century as they did the disciples of Jesus in the first century. Hence, we may expect that the cross which we must bear will be very similar to that of the apostles and disciples of the Lord. We Christians of today are afflicted with many troubles and sorrows similar to those of the disciples; we, too, must put up with hatred and persecution on the part of unbelievers and hypocrites. But the promise of Jesus: "I go to prepare a place for you," is intended for us also. From it we should gain the comforting reassurance that by virtue of Christ's ascension we shall also ascend to the heavenly mansions, if we remain faithful unto the end. We may now confidently say with the Christian poet:—

Since Christ has gone to heaven, His home,
I, too, that home one day must share
And in this hope I overcome
All doubt, all anguish, and despair;
For where the Head is, well we know,
The members He has left below
In time He surely gathers.

That is the goal to which we may look forward since Christ's ascension into heaven. O what joy and happiness awaits us there!

Yes, we are certain that, after our departure from this vale of tears, we shall ascend into heaven, where we shall be with Christ, and see Him face to face forevermore. That is the welcome message which is proclaimed to us annually on Ascension Day. Can we, then, be sad and mournful on this blessed day? Indeed not! Let us, like the disciples, rejoice over the ascension of our dear Savior and praise, bless, and glorify God. May our daily prayer therefore be:—

From Thy ascension let such grace,
Dear Lord, be ever found in me,
That steadfast faith may guide my ways
With step unfalt'ring up to Thee,
And at Thy voice I may depart
With joy to dwell where Thou, Lord, art;
Lord, hear my supplication!

Amen.

Sixth Sunday after Easter.

(Confirmation)

Acts 2, 42.

They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

"Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." Rev. 2, 10. Thus Jesus spoke to the angel of the church at Smyrna in Asia Minor. By the angel of the church the pastor is meant. The name of the pastor is not given in the Bible, but we know from Church History that his name was *Polycarp*.

Polycarp was, indeed, faithful unto his death, for he willingly suffered martyrdom under Marcus Aurelius on April 6, 166.*

The Gentiles considered the Christians atheists, because they would not worship idols. Polycarp was eighty-six years old when he was burned at the stake on account of his Christian faith. He was the last one of those Christian pastors who had been taught by the great Apostle St. John. A number of Christians had just been tortured to death, when the multitude, assembled in the amphitheater, demanded in addition the death of Polycarp. "Away with the atheists! Search for Polycarp!" they cried out. Polycarp was brought in. The proconsul said to him in a friendly manner: "What harm can there be in saying, 'The Emperor, our Lord!' and in sacrificing?" Polycarp said: "I shall not do as you advise." The proconsul then reminded him of his great age, and urged him to swear by the Genius of the Emperor, saying: "Swear, and I release thee, revile Christ!" Then Polycarp answered: "Eighty and six years have I served Him (Jesus Christ), and He has never done me wrong; how can I blaspheme Him, my King, who saved me?" When the proconsul again pressed him, saying: "Swear by the Genius of the Emperor!" Polycarp replied: "If thou cherishest the vain thought that I will swear by the Genius of the Emperor, as thou sayest, and pretendest not to know who I am, hear it plainly, *I am a Christian!*" Polycarp had professed Jesus Christ before men. His confession was officially proclaimed to the multitude with these

* During the reign of Marcus Aurelius, Roman emperor from 161—180, the *fifth* of the so-called Ten Great Persecutions of the Christians ranged.

words: "Polycarp has confessed himself to be a Christian." Hardly had the herald made the proclamation, when the multitude cried out: "This is the teacher of impiety, the father of the Christians, the enemy of our gods, who teaches so many not to sacrifice, nor to worship the gods." With all speed they collected wood from the workshops near by, and made a pile. Polycarp was unwilling to be fastened to the stake. "Leave me thus," he said, "He who strengthens me to endure the fire will also enable me to stand firm at the stake without being fastened with nails. Then after he had prayed with a loud voice: "Lord God Almighty, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, I praise Thee that Thou hast judged me worthy of this day and this hour, to participate in the number of Thy witnesses and in the cup of Christ," he was consumed by the flames. Indeed, Polycarp was faithful to the Lord unto death, and he received the crown of life.

It is the Lord's will that *all* Christians should be and remain faithful to Him unto death, for He says to every individual Christian: "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." Therefore the important question arises: What must Christians do, if they would be and remain faithful unto death? The correct answer to this question we find in our text. Let me, then, beloved friends, especially dear catechumens, now give answer to the question:

What Must Christians Do, if They Would Be and Remain Faithful to the Lord unto Death?

They must continue steadfastly,

1. *In the apostles' doctrine;* 2. *In Christian fellowship;*
3. *In the breaking of bread,* and 4. *In prayers.*

1.

St. Luke says of the three thousand, who were converted on the first Christian Pentecost and the apostolic Christians in general: "*They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and breaking of bread, and in prayers.*"

What, then, beloved catechumens, is meant by the *apostles' doctrine* in which the apostolic Christians continued steadfastly, that is, without wavering? I am persuaded that every one of you is able to answer this question correctly, for all of you know that by the doctrine of the holy apostles nothing else is understood than the Word of God. The apostles taught and preached nothing else than the doctrines contained in the Bible; they taught and

preached what Jesus Himself had taught and preached while He was upon earth. None of the holy apostles would ever preach anything that was contrary to the Word of God, nor would they ever discard any Bible-doctrine. They preached the Word of God in its entirety and purity. The apostolic Christians did not think nor assert that the Lord and His apostles had overlooked certain things, and that therefore it was their duty to add to the doctrines of Jesus and His apostles certain doctrines, or that Jesus and His apostles had gone too far in some respects, and that therefore certain of their doctrines could not be preached, but had to be suppressed, otherwise many people would be offended and never join the Church. No, the apostolic Christians were not of one mind with the liberal Christians of our time, and their preachers in those days were not like unto the liberal preachers, who preach anything and everything except the doctrine of Jesus and His apostles.

The Word of God, as it was preached by the apostles, is two-fold: *Law* and *Gospel*. The apostles preached the Law of God in all its severity, so that sinners might learn to know their sinfulness, and become terrified on account of God's wrath over sin; but they also directed the terrified sinners to the grace of God as it has been revealed in Christ Jesus. The apostles and apostolic preachers told the terrified sinners to look to Jesus as the one and only Savior of sinful mankind, and they urged every sinner to accept Jesus and His work of redemption by true faith; to rely and trust for eternal salvation in the redemption wrought by the bitter sufferings and the ignominious death of the God-man Savior Jesus Christ. And, furthermore, they admonished the believers to show their love and gratitude to the Savior by living a truly Christian life, by serving Him who suffered and died for them that they might live eternally.

The apostles' doctrine, the Bible doctrine, my beloved catechumens, was taught to you in your home, school, and church up to this very day. You have learned the gist of the apostles' doctrine as it is contained in our Catechism. Last Sunday you rendered an account of your Christian knowledge, and today you are going to vow that you will always be faithful to your Savior and His Church. If you would keep this vow, as Polycarp and the apostolic Christians did, then you must do what they did: you must continue steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine unto your end. If you will permit false teachers to lead you away from the

apostles' doctrine, if you will permit them to fill your head and heart with the modern wishy-washy religion that abounds in many churches, then, my beloved catechumens, you will not and you cannot be and remain faithful to your Savior unto your end. But if you remain firm in the apostles' doctrine, that is, in the doctrine of the Bible, then you can and will remain true to Jesus and His Church, and you will be His disciples indeed, for He said: "If ye continue in My word then are ye My disciples indeed, and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." John 8, 31. 32.

If you would be faithful to the Lord unto death, then, beloved catechumens, you must also continue in the fellowship of the disciples of Jesus Christ.

2.

St. Luke says of the apostolic Christians: "*They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship.*"

Man is so constituted that he must have fellowship with some one. And as Christians are human beings they must have fellowship with each other. When the three thousand people that were converted on the first Christian Pentecost became Christians, they continued in the fellowship of the holy apostles and other disciples of Jesus Christ. They joined the Christian congregation at Jerusalem. Before their conversion they, perhaps, did not even know the apostles and the other Christians in Jerusalem, and therefore had no fellowship with them at all. Before their conversion they had fellowship with the enemies of Jesus and His disciples. But as soon as they had become disciples of Jesus, they continued steadfastly in the fellowship with the holy apostles and other disciples of the Lord, and they did all within their power to help Christianize the Jews and Gentiles. But they had no church-fellowship with them, as the modern theologians and liberal Christians have in our time. They did not invite a Jewish rabbi to preach unto them, nor a Gentile philosopher to enlighten them on Evolution. No, the apostolic Christians had fellowship only with their fellow-Christians, and in this fellowship they continued steadfastly, and thus they became more and more stablished in their Christian faith and practise, and remained faithful to the Lord unto death.

That is what you also must do, beloved catechumens, if you would be and remain faithful to Jesus, His Word, and His

Church unto your end. There is an adage, which reads, "Tell me with whom thou hast fellowship, and I will tell thee who thou art." If you will not fellowship with your fellow-church-members, but with the worldlings and false Christians, then, beloved catechumens, you will never be and remain faithful to your Lord and Savior. Sooner or later you will deny Him, His Word, and His Church, and finally you will be eternally lost. Therefore continue in intimate fellowship with your dear Church and fellow-Christians, then, by the assistance of the Holy Spirit you will be and remain faithful to your Savior unto death and be eternally saved.

Of those three thousand converts and other apostolic Christians in Jerusalem St. Luke tells us, furthermore, that they also continued steadfastly in the breaking of bread.

3.

We read in our text: "*They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread.*"

What is meant by the term, *breaking of bread*? By this term is meant the Sacrament of the Altar or the Lord's Supper. The apostolic Christians celebrated the Lord's Supper often, every Sunday, for we are told in Acts 20, 7 that upon the first day of the week, that is, Sunday, the disciples came together to break the bread, to celebrate the Sacrament of the Altar. They celebrated it every Sunday, no doubt, because they were persecuted on account of their Christian faith, and therefore in great danger of being killed any day. But that was not their only reason for approaching the Table of the Lord so frequently. They were also more fervent in their love to Jesus than Christians usually are nowadays; they were much more spiritually minded than church people generally are in the present time. It is the will of Jesus that Christians should frequently partake of His Supper, for He said: "This do ye, as often as ye drink it in remembrance of Me." If church-members have no real longing to commune frequently, it is to be feared that they are not true Christians at all. Dr. Luther says in his Introduction to his Small Catechism that, if a person does not at least approach the Lord's Table some four times a year, it is to be feared that he is no Christian, but a self-righteous Pharisee. When Christians neglect the Lord's Table they will grow weaker and weaker in their faith and finally their faith will die. That is the reason why so many Christians do not

remain faithful to the Lord unto their end. If you, beloved catechumens, would be and remain faithful unto death then you must diligently partake of the Lord's Supper as poor sinners, who realize their sinfulness and put their trust in Jesus blood and righteousness. Then you will be and remain faithful to the Lord unto your end.

But, finally, St. Luke tells us of the apostolic Christians that they also continued steadfastly in their prayers.

4.

"They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers."

Christians must not only have fellowship with each other, but also with God. They fellowship with God by their prayers. God's children must pray. In all ages the children of God have been very diligent in their prayers. The patriarchs prayed; the prophets prayed; the apostles prayed; the apostolic Christians prayed. Even to this very day you cannot find a Christian in this wide world who does not diligently pray.

To whom do all true Christians pray? They pray only to the one true God. Who is the one true God? The one true God is the *Triune* God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. All people who do not pray to the Triune God, pray to idols, to something which is not God. All prayers in which the name of Jesus Christ is *purposely omitted*, are an abomination to God. Jesus Himself said to His disciples: "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it you." Again He said: "All men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father which hath sent Him." John 5, 23.

The three thousand people who were converted on the first Christian Pentecost did not pray to the true God before their conversion, because they did not pray to the Triune God; they did not believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and therefore they did not pray to Him. But as soon as they became converted they also prayed to Jesus, for now they truly believed that He is the very Son of God. Thus it was also with Saul of Tarsus. As a Pharisee he did not pray to the true God, because he did not believe that Jesus is the true Son of God. But after his conversion he prayed to the Triune God, to the Father, Son, and Holy

Spirit. And so it is to this very day. All true Christians pray to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, — to the Triune God.

If you, therefore, would be and remain faithful unto death, my beloved catechumens, then you must do what all true Christians have done at all times and what they do even to this very day: you must diligently pray to the only true God: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. By your daily communication with the true God you will be strengthened in your faith. Therefore be diligent in prayers. Never forget your daily prayers, and always pray with a believing heart, trusting in Jesus Christ and His work of redemption. Never absent yourself from family worship, and diligently attend public worship. And when in public worship do not fail to join in the singing of our beautiful hymns, for all our hymns are either prayers and supplications or songs of praise and thanksgiving (doxologies).

Yes, God grant, dear catechumens, that you may do what St. Luke says in our text of the apostolic Christians, namely, *Continue steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers!* Amen.

Pentecost Sunday.

Acts 2, 1—13.

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed and marveled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue wherein we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians; we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God. And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this? Others, mocking, said, These men are full of new wine.

Today we are again celebrating Pentecost. We observe this festival in commemoration of the visible outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles in the city of Jerusalem. Ten days previous, on the day of His glorious ascension into heaven, Jesus had told His disciples: "John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. When they, therefore, were come together, they asked of Him, saying, Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And He said unto them, It is not for you to know the times of the seasons which the Father hath put in His own power. But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." Acts 1, 5—8. This prophecy was fulfilled; for when the apostles and many other disciples of the Lord on the day of Pentecost were assembled for the purpose of observing the festival in accordance with the ancient custom to commemorate the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai, "*suddenly there came,*" as we read in our text, "*a sound from heaven as of a rushing*

mighty wind, and filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." The festival of Pentecost now had a new and altogether different meaning. In the spirit of this first Pentecost of the new Testament, this memorable event is still observed by all Christians throughout the whole world.

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles of Jesus Christ being such a great and wonderful event, wonderful consequences followed upon it. Immediately the holy apostles became true model Christians. They exemplified that kind of Christianity which makes them worthy of being regarded as prototypes for all believing, confessing, and zealous Christians. As such examples worthy of emulation we shall now hold them up to our view. In accordance with our text, and by the assistance of the Holy Spirit, let me, then, present for your attentive consideration:—

The Apostles of Jesus Christ — Excellent Models for All Christians.

This they are in view of

1. *Their strong faith;*
2. *Their courage as confessors of Jesus Christ; and*
3. *Their missionary zeal.*

1.

St. Luke tells us in our text: "*And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.*" Pentecost is a Greek word, meaning, "the fiftieth," that is, the fiftieth day after Easter. On this festival day the apostles and, most probably, the one hundred and twenty believers in the city of Jerusalem, were assembled, being of "one heart and of one soul." Here was true unity of faith: hearts united by mutual love and trust in Christ and His blessed promises. They had assembled for divine worship,—not in the Temple, but in a private home, for their faith was not strong enough to overcome their fear of meeting in public places, hence they secretly congregated and remained behind closed doors. The history of their lives until that time proves that the apostles of the Lord had been timid, weak in faith. The Lord had often called their attention to this fact. During the storm on the Sea of Galilee,

when the apostles were on the verge of despair, Jesus said to them: "O ye of little faith!" On His last journey to the city of Jerusalem, He had informed them that the time had come in which all prophecies concerning His suffering, death and resurrection would be fulfilled, but St. Luke tells us: "They understood none of these things which were spoken" (Luke 18, 34). In other words, they did not believe that sinful mankind would be redeemed by the suffering and death of Jesus, but that some other means would be used to bring about their redemption. Yes, even after Jesus appeared unto them after His glorious resurrection, they had a weak, wavering faith. Their faith was not nearly so strong and firm as it should have been.

But what a great change the first New Testament Pentecost brings about! Now all at once they become heroes of faith. Forthwith their faith, which heretofore was so weak, becomes firm and immovable. By virtue of their strong faith they suddenly had become excellent models, ideal patterns, and examples of faith for all Christians.

We ask, Whence the great change? Who or what caused them to become pillars, heroes of faith? The answer is given us in our text, for we read: "*And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost.*" From these words of our text we learn that it was due to the outpouring of the Holy Ghost that the apostles became so strong in faith. The Holy Spirit had arrayed them with extraordinary talents. Being filled with the Holy Spirit they had subordinated their own reason and judgment to the Word of the Lord.

Pre-eminently in this respect they are excellent models for all Christians. When a person heeds and believes God's Word, instead of depending on his own erratic reason and limited knowledge, he will become strong and firm in his faith. This is shown us not only by the example of the holy apostles, but also by that of the early Christian martyrs and others, who in child-like faith steadfastly adhered to the Word of God, which imbued them with strength and courage so that they could cheerfully suffer a martyr's death.

We find the same thing to be true of the great Reformer of the Church, Dr. Martin Luther. When he was still enshrouded

in the darkness of the papacy, and had not yet learned to cling solely to the Word of God, he was a weak, wavering, and doubtful soul; how strong, firm, and inflexible Luther's faith was, however, after he began to rely upon the Word of God with child-like simplicity! Bible Christians have always been staunch believers. The reason why there are so few heroes of faith among Christians today is because so few accept the Word of God as the only true norm and rule in matters of faith and practice, preferring to follow their own fallacious mode of reasoning.

How is it with you, my dear friend? Are you filled with the Holy Spirit? It is true, the Holy Spirit has not descended upon you visibly, as He did on the apostles; nevertheless, you have received similar power and benefit through the Word and Sacraments. If you accept the Word of God which is preached to you with a believing heart, you too, will become strong and firm in faith as did the apostles of Jesus, the martyrs, Luther, and many others. Only sincere faith of the heart, child-like reliance upon God's Word, is necessary for a Christian to become strong in his faith. A staunch believer will, moreover, at all times, also have the *courage to confess his faith*, as the holy apostles did. Of this I shall now speak to you in the second place.

2.

Before the first New Testament Pentecost the apostles were just as weak in their confession as in their faith. The courage to confess their faith in Jesus had been lacking. To be sure, in the presence of Jesus they often talked big and appeared bold. Even on the way to Gethsemane, when Jesus told them that they would all be offended because of Him, they refused to admit the possibility of such a thing; but how disgracefully they forsook their Lord and Master the very same night! And even after His resurrection they assembled themselves behind locked doors for fear of the Jews.

How different was their conduct after the events of the first New Testament Pentecost! On that day they had instantly become heroic confessors; they had been endowed with the courage of heroes. No longer were they timid and afraid. When a multitude of people, attracted by the rushing mighty wind, crowded about the house, where the apostles and other disciples of the Lord were assembled, they made no attempt to flee, but took advantage of this opportunity to preach Christ Jesus, the crucified and resurrected Savior, speaking in many different languages.

Neither did they mince words, but told the Jews to their faces that they had killed the Son of God. Yes, in plain, unmistakable words they showed their audience the necessity of repenting and being baptized. They were not ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but they quite frankly, without the least restraint, proclaimed the saving Gospel alike to rich and poor, to the learned and illiterate. Never before had they dared to do that. Surely, they had become heroic confessors!

Again, we ask, What brought about such a great change? I answer, It was the result of their being filled with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit had renewed their hearts and made them courageous confessors. He caused them to think only of giving glory to God and saving immortal souls. Now that their faith had become strong the courage to confess their faith had also greatly increased. Not only as staunch believers, but also as courageous confessors the apostles deserve to be regarded as excellent models for all Christians.

Many Christians have followed the example of the holy apostles. In reading the history of the martyrs we find that they possessed remarkable courage to confess their faith. Not even a martyr's death could make them waver. In like manner every Christian, who implicitly believes God's Word, will be found to be a bold and courageous confessor. Thus it was also with Luther. How bravely did he confess his Lord and Savior before the Diet at Worms on April 18, 1521! What an heroic act it was when he burned the papal Bull of Excommunication against him on December 10, 1520! And what courage and boldness of confessing his faith did he exhibit on October 31, 1517, when he nailed his famous 95 theses to the door of the Castle-Church at Wittenberg!

Have you, my friend, such courage to confess your Savior openly to friend and foe? Or are you one of those who are afraid to confess Jesus Christ either in public or in private? Is it possible that you do not confess Him because you are afraid of losing the friendship, good will, and financial support of unbelievers and scoffers? If such is the case, you ought to feel ashamed of such cowardice. O follow the example of the holy apostles! Pray to God for the gift of the Holy Spirit that you may become a true and courageous confessor of your Savior. Unless you confess your Savior you cannot hope to be eternally saved. However, if you are a faithful confessor of Jesus Christ, you will

also be filled with true *missionary zeal for the extension of Christ's kingdom*. And of this I shall now speak to you in the third place.

3.

Until the day of the first New Testament Pentecost the apostles had shown very little missionary zeal. Holy Scripture records of them that, when some Jewish mothers brought their young children to Jesus that He might bless them, the apostles tried to prevent those mothers from bringing their little ones to Jesus. Another instance mentioned in the Bible, which reveals to us that the apostles lacked the proper missionary zeal, occurred when the Syrophenician woman begged Jesus prayerfully to heal her daughter, and the apostles, becoming impatient, besought Jesus to send her away, saying: "Send her away, for she crieth after us." (See: Mark 7, 24—30.)

But on the day of the first New Testament Pentecost a great and wonderful change is noticed as taking place in the apostles also in this respect. After they were filled with the Holy Spirit their mistaken notions concerning the purpose of Christ's kingdom vanished. Now they realized that the kingdom of Jesus Christ was not of an earthly, but a spiritual nature, that it could be built up and extended only by means of the preaching of the Word of God and by the administration of the Holy Sacraments. Accordingly, they at once began to preach the Word and requested their hearers to be baptized. They were filled with such a burning zeal and they preached the Word with such eloquence and power that three thousand souls were converted to Christ and baptized on that day. And from that day to the day of their death their missionary zeal never diminished, but it became even more intense and made them entirely unmindful of personal sacrifices and hardships.

Recalling to mind their former lack of missionary zeal, we ask, What brought about this wonderful change? The answer is, The Holy Spirit filled their hearts with a burning missionary zeal, with the undying desire to save immortal souls. It follows from this that a true Christian, who implicitly trusts and believes God's Word and confesses it with courage, never will be found wanting in true missionary zeal. Such staunch believers and courageous confessors of God's Word will always be willing and active workers for God's kingdom. They will follow the example of the apostles and ever be ready to bring the saving

Gospel to the starving souls of their fellow-men; they will be willing to make large personal sacrifices of their talents, time, and money in order to win immortal souls for Christ.

My dear friend, are you such a Christian? Are you imbued with real missionary zeal? Are you doing all within your power to advance the cause of Christ's kingdom? Do you give freely of the gifts with which God has so richly blessed you? Do you contribute towards the maintenance of your church and missionary endeavors according to your means and with a cheerful heart? Have you ever paused to think what a wonderful privilege God is giving you in allowing you to help Him expand His kingdom here on earth? The great Apostle St. Paul calls you a "co-worker with Christ." Have you ever really grasped the significance of that name? You would feel highly honored, and rightly so, if our *President* should choose you as a member of his cabinet, and thus make you one of his co-workers. How much more ought you to feel honored to know that *God* has appointed you to be His co-worker! Are you willing to accept that honor and responsibility and to serve Him faithfully? If you are, — and you ought to be, — then do not neglect to ask God to send His Holy Spirit into your heart to fill it, like that of the apostles, with true love for His Word, with undaunted courage to confess it, and with real missionary zeal to carry on energetic work in His kingdom. And may God grant us this Pentecostal request for Jesus' sake! Amen.

Trinity Sunday.

Matt. 3, 13—17.

Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbade Him, saying, I have need to be baptized of Thee, and comest Thou to me? And Jesus, answering, said unto him, Suffer it to be so now; for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered Him. And Jesus, when He was baptized, went up straightway out of the water; and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting upon Him: and, lo, a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

Everybody knows that there is a God. All men, endowed with common sense, possess that knowledge. Even the most ignorant and uncultured among humankind, realize the existence of a deity. The great Apostle St. Paul, speaking of the heathen, says: "That which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath showed it unto them. For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse." Rom. 1, 19. 20.

The source of such knowledge, as well as the reason why all men with a capacity for reasoning have not denied the existence of a God to this very day, is to be found in the fact that common sense compels them to admit that everything which we see cannot have originated of itself, but that it must have been made, and that the Creator of those things must be a supernatural being. Consequently the Holy Scriptures brand those who say *that there is no God as fools* (Ps. 14, 1). Yes, indeed, he who denies the existence of God, is certainly a great fool. But, as a rule, such fools think themselves wise. With such a conceited fool I frequently had to deal in former days. One day our conversation turned to religion. He asked me, whether I really believed that there is a personal God, who had called everything there is into existence? I answered that it was certainly my firm conviction that such a God existed, and necessarily must exist, and referred him to the visible creation as proof for my belief. As I had expected, his answer was that the world and everything in it was the work of *nature*. Thereupon I requested him to define "nature," to tell me what he understood by that term. He hesitated, tried to explain, but could give me no answer. I told

him that probably with the expression "nature" he meant to describe what philosophers call the "laws of nature." "That's it!" he exclaimed. Finally, I asked him whether he had ever heard of a law originating of itself, whether *every law* must not come from some *law-giver*? Naturally, he had to admit that every law must be the product of some kind of law-giver. "Well, then," said I, "don't you see that there must be a God who made and gave the *laws of nature*?" He was silent; and though he did not say so, it must have been evident to him that he had revealed himself a self-conceited fool by his foolish talking. It is of such foolish people that St. Paul says: "Professing themselves to be wise, they become fools." Rom. 1, 22.

But though all men of sound reason readily admit that there must be an almighty and all-knowing God, not all such men know *who* and *what* the *true God* is. Moreover, no man, it matters not how wise and intelligent he is or considers himself to be, — can of himself find out and determine who is the true God. It is only from the Word of God, from the Bible, that a man can learn about the true God, for in His Word God Himself has told us who and what He is. He declares that He is a *triune God*. As the Triune God He has revealed Himself to us also in our text. In accordance with the same and by the assistance of the Holy Spirit, let me now call your devout attention to the fact, —

That the True God is the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Let me show,

1. *How certain this truth is, and*
2. *Unto what this truth should move us.*

1.

Our text tells us of the baptism of Jesus. John the Baptist had appeared on the banks of the Jordan, preaching to great multitudes of people and calling them to repentance and Baptism. In this manner he prepared the way for the Lord into the hearts of men. From cities, large and small, from all parts of the Jewish land, people came to hear him. But they did not only hear him, they also confessed their sins and asked to be baptized.

One day Jesus also came to John and asked him to baptize Him. John the Baptist, knowing that Jesus was the Son of God incarnate, was greatly astonished at the request of Jesus, and justly so; for Jesus was not a sinful man. John, therefore, was

very reluctant to baptize Jesus. However, when Jesus insisted on being baptized by him, John consented.

Not only did it become evident to John and the people who were present on the occasion of the baptism of Jesus that He was in truth the promised Messiah, but it also became clear to them that the true God is the Triune God. God the Father called down from heaven: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased"; whereas the Holy Ghost appeared in the form of a dove and descended upon Jesus. So here at the baptism of Jesus the true God revealed Himself as the Triune God, that is, as three distinct Persons in one divine Essence. Granting, then, for the sake of argument, that nowhere else in Holy Scripture the *trinity* of God were alluded to, this one passage, nevertheless, would be sufficient to prove the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. There are, however, as we well know, other passages in the Bible which teach us this same truth.

When Jesus, shortly before His glorious ascension into heaven, commissioned His disciples to preach the Gospel, He said unto them: "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Matt. 28, 18, 19. These words of Jesus tell us in unmistakable language that the true God is the Triune God.

People who deny the Holy Trinity often say that in the one Godhead there are not three distinct Persons, but only one, and that this one Person revealed Himself at times as Father, at other times as Son, and again at other times as Holy Spirit. However plausible that might sound to them, we know that it cannot be true. Only a person that is ignorant of what the Bible says can make such an assertion. Wherever the Bible speaks of the Persons of the Godhead, it always maintains in clear and indisputable terms, that there are three distinct Persons in the Godhead. The Father is a different Person than the Son and the Holy Ghost; and the Son is a different Person than the Father and the Holy Ghost; and the Holy Ghost is a different Person than the Father and the Son. In the second Psalm the Father says to the Son: "Thou art My Son; this day have I begotten Thee." In the fifteenth chapter of St. John Jesus says: "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you in all things." Passages such as these plainly show that the true God is the Triune God.

According to their *divine* attributes all three Persons are exactly alike, for all three Persons are eternal, omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, holy, just, faithful, benevolent, merciful, gracious, etc. However, in respect to their *personal* attributes they differ greatly from one another; for the personal attribute of the Father consists in this, that He from eternity has begotten the Son; the personal attribute of the Son consists in this, that He from eternity is begotten of the Father; and the personal attribute of the Holy Spirit consists in this, that He from eternity proceeds from the Father and the Son.

Thus we see that there cannot be the least doubt about it that the true God has revealed Himself in His Word as *one God in three distinct Persons*. The only true God, therefore, is the Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Anything else which men might designate and worship as God is not God, but an idol.

Unto what should this truth move us? This question I shall answer in the second place.

2.

The great majority of men do not worship the one and only true God, the Triune God, though they speak of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and call themselves Christians.

The *Unitarians* and *Universalists*, for example, often speak about the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but never in the Biblical sense, that is, that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three distinct Persons in one divine Essence, but in the perverted sense that God at times revealed Himself as Father, at other times as Son, and again at other times as Holy Spirit. They do not believe in nor do they worship the true God, but they worship a sort of chameleon-god. Naturally, they are not Christians and cannot be eternally saved.

Again, the so-called *Christian Scientists* who, in order to deceive the true Christians, make a show of being the very best Christians, are idolaters, for the god whom they worship is only an imaginary god. They do not honor nor adore the true God. Christian Scientists teach that there is no personal God at all. To them God is only an abstract idea, a principle, as they say. The Holy Spirit, according to their doctrine, is divine science. Of Jesus Christ they teach that He is not the true Son of God, for since God is not a personal being, but only a principle, it must follow that He could have no son. And strange to say, there are many people, calling themselves Christians, who permit

themselves to be deceived by such nonsense and accept it as the true doctrine of the Bible! Many such deluded Christians have heeded the siren call of the Christian Scientists and have thrown the true God and only Savior overboard. Needless to say, they no longer are Christians, but idolaters, and they will be eternally lost.

Moreover, also the so-called *Russellites*, or, as they call themselves, Bible Students, are not true believers in the true God, but idol-worshippers. One of their destructive doctrines concerns the person of Jesus Christ. They teach that Jesus Christ was the Son of God inasmuch as God created Him first of all creatures. With this doctrine they make of Jesus Christ a creature. If it were true, as the Russellites say, that Jesus was a creature, then He could not be God's Son, co-equal with the Father and Holy Ghost. We must, therefore, also regard the Russellites as outside the pale of the Christian Church, because they do not believe that Jesus Christ is very God of very God. Russellites do not believe in nor do they worship the true God, the Triune God, and thus they are idolaters, and cannot be eternally saved.

Into this same category of people who are idolaters because they deny the true or Triune God, also belong the *Mormons*, the *Jews*, the *Theosophists*, the *Ethical Culturists*, the *Transcendentalists*, the *Spiritists*, the *Quakers*, the *Swedenborgians*, the *Rationalists*, the *Campbellites*, and many others. We have not the time to discuss each one of these many anti-trinitarian sects separately. May it suffice to say, that they all reject the Bible doctrine of the Holy Trinity; they all deny that there are three distinct Persons in the one divine Essence.

However, before we proceed, we must direct our attention to one more powerful, world-wide organization of idol-worshippers. I mean the secret societies, the anti-Christ associations, commonly called *lodges*. These are doing everything they possibly can to ensnare the true Christians in their lodges and force upon them their soul-destroying lodge-religion. Lodge members, who believe and adhere to the doctrines of the lodge, cannot be true Christians, because they do not worship the only true God, the Triune God, — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We may sum up the creed of all antichristian lodges in this maxim:

We all believe in a common God,
Jew, Christian, Turk, and Hottentot.

Of course, there are some people who have joined lodges, but

still believe in and adore the Triune God. They joined the anti-christian lodges because they were ignorant of the nature of the religion of the lodges. But if they, after having their eyes opened, still remain within the antichristian lodges, they have only themselves to blame for being eternally lost. Remember, my friends, lodges practise idolatry, and he who dies in this great sin, cannot hope to be eternally saved. The religion of the lodges is not based on the faith in the Triune God, since it rejects the Bible doctrine that Jesus Christ is the very Son of God, co-equal with the Father and the Holy Spirit. The Bible says: "All men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that honoreth not the Son, honoreth not the Father which hath sent Him." John 5, 23. Again, Holy Scripture says: "Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved." Acts 4, 12. Anybody, therefore, who accepts the religion of any church or society which does not confess and worship the one true God, the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, cannot be a Christian, and, therefore, cannot be eternally saved; for all those who deny Jesus Christ to be the very Son of God bring upon themselves swift destruction (2 Pet. 2, 1).

If we, my beloved friends, wish to be eternally saved, we must believe and trust in, worship and serve, the only one true God, the Triune God, who has revealed Himself in Holy Scripture as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. If we will not do it, we are eternally lost. We cannot serve two masters. It is useless for men to profess faith in the Triune God with their lips and deny Him in their hearts. We and all men must either serve the Triune God, the only true God, or idols. It would be the height of inconsistency for us if we, as members of a Christian church, tried to worship and serve the true God, and at the same time, as members of an antichristian lodge or society, tried to serve and worship an idol, a false god. We cannot serve God with a divided heart. God demands that we love Him with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind. We must be either *for* Him or *against* Him. We cannot choose a middle-ground. A clear-cut decision must be reached. God still demands to know: "How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him." 1 Kings 18, 21.

Let us, my dear fellow-Christians, heed God's warning in time! Let us act in accordance with His solemn admonition:

“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.”
2 Cor. 6, 14—18.

Yes, the divine truth that the true God is the Triune God, should move us to believe in Him with all our heart, to worship Him with all our mind, and to serve Him with all our strength!

Glory be to God the Father,
Glory be to God the Son,
Glory be to God the Spirit,
Everlasting Three in One:
Thee let heaven and earth adore,
Now, henceforth, and evermore.

Amen.

First Sunday after Trinity.

Luke 16, 19—31.

There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day; and there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table; moreover, the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom; the rich man also died, and was buried; and in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us that would come from thence. Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house; for I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, Father Abraham; but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.

The twenty-fourth chapter of St. Matthew relates that Jesus said to His disciples that in the latter times of this world many false prophets would arise and deceive many people, insomuch that, if it were possible, the very elect would be deceived. This prediction of our dear Savior is now being literally fulfilled. The world is full of false prophets, and many people are being deceived by them.

Chief of all false prophets that have arisen in our country in recent years is the late Charles T. Russell. He was the leader of the "International Bible Students' Association." His writings, comprising six rather bulky volumes, still have a wide circulation. Many of his so-called sermons have been published in most of the weekly papers and in many periodicals, and have been read by millions of people.

This man Russell called himself a Christian preacher, a preacher of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and a Bible-student. He

used many Christian phrases in his lectures and writings. These are the sheep's clothing of the ravening wolf.

How do we know that Russell was, and that his successors today are, ravening wolves in sheep's clothing? I answer: We know it from the doctrines which he and his adherents teach. Russellism teaches that Jesus Christ was not divine before He became man, and that He, during His abode on this earth, was only human that, therefore, a mere man suffered and died for us. It teaches that Christ's body was not resurrected from His grave, but that it was dissolved into gas, and that Jesus after His death is only a spirit being, but no longer a human being in any sense. Russellism furthermore teaches that the second advent of Christ had taken place in the year 1874; that the saints were raised up in 1878; that the professing Christian Church was rejected of God in 1878. Russell also taught that the end of the world was to come during the month of October, 1914. He denied the doctrine of the Bible concerning the Holy Trinity, for he was perfectly silent as to the person of the Holy Spirit, and he taught that there is no hell, no retribution in the hereafter. The teaching of the Bible concerning hell Russell either evades or gives a figurative interpretation. "The grotesque subject of one of his most popular lectures," says Prof. W. G. Moorehead, D.D., "a lecture he has delivered throughout our country, in Canada, and also in England, and published in a vast number of papers and periodicals, is 'To Hell and Back Again.' Crowds have listened with no little satisfaction to his assertions that there is no hell, no eternal punishment, and no hopelessness after death."

No one can deny that Russell's doctrines are anti-Scriptural through and through. If the Bible teaches anything at all, it surely teaches a future retribution. Aside from many other passages our text clearly teaches that there is not only a heaven, but also a hell. And it was Jesus Himself who spoke the words in our text. Let me, then, beloved friends, now call your devout attention to—

Three Important Facts Taught by Jesus in Our Text:

1. *That there is a hell, a place of punishment;*
2. *That the fate of those in hell is terrible;*
3. *That all unbelievers will be punished in hell.*

1.

Russell's followers want to be Christians; they even consider themselves the true exemplars of all Christians. We should suppose that they would accept the words of Jesus Christ, as all Christians surely must do if they would be *true* Christians.

Russell and others like him tell us that the doctrine of the the Christian Church concerning hell is a fabrication of cunning deceivers; that the people in the time of Christ really believed that there was a place of future retribution for the ungodly and wicked, and that Christ accommodated Himself to this belief in His public utterances, that is, that Christ knew that there is no hell, but that He thought it best to let people believe in a hell. These men are surely judging Christ by themselves. What they themselves do for reasons that can only be conjectured, they believe Jesus Christ would also do; and yet they say that they believe Jesus to be divine. That is not only a contradiction, but refined blasphemy.

Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. His Word is truth; He cannot lie or deceive. If there were no hell, Jesus would have refuted the doctrine of the Jews concerning it. He was not slow in rebuking the false teachers in Israel in all His dealings with them. How often did He not tell them that they knew not the Scriptures at all! How often did He not vehemently rebuke them for their false worship, their false and hypocritical conduct! He surely did not spare the scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees in His denunciations against all hypocrisy! How often did He not call out to them: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Woe unto you, ye blind guides!" Matt. 23, 15, 16. For any one who has read the New Testament, especially the twenty-third chapter of St. Matthew, it is clear that Jesus would not have held His peace if the Jewish doctrine concerning hell were a fiction; no, He would have told the people how they had been deceived.

Jesus often spoke of the future retribution of the unbelievers in hell. Let me call your attention to such passages in which He speaks of hell. In our text He says: "*There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day. And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table; moreover, the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came*

to pass that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died, and was buried; and in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments." Jesus Himself says that the rich man lifted up his eyes in hell.

Even if this passage were the only one, then, beloved friends, Christians could not and would not doubt in the least that there is a hell, for they know that Jesus Christ cannot deceive any one, nor can He lie, for He is Truth personified. But we find many other passages in the New Testament from the sacred lips of Jesus which prove that there is a hell.

In His Sermon on the Mount He says that it is far better for a man to pluck out his eye, and to cut off his hand and cast it from himself, if his eye and hand cause him to sin, than that his whole body shall be cast into hell. And again He says in that same sermon that whosoever shall say to his brother, "Thou fool," shall be in danger of hell-fire.

In the eighth chapter according to St. Matthew He says: "And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom," (that is, the unbelievers in the churches), "shall be cast out into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." These very words He again uses in the twenty-second, twenty-fourth, and twenty-fifth chapters.

Again, in the tenth chapter He says to His disciples: "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." And to quote one more passage, He said to the unbelieving and self-righteous scribes and Pharisees: "How can ye escape the damnation of hell?" Matt. 23, 33.

Of course, my friends, God did not prepare hell for man, but for the devil and his angels; man prepares himself for it by his unbelief and wickedness; for Jesus said that He will say to those on His left hand in the Last Judgment: "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels....And these shall go away into everlasting punishment" (Matt. 25, 41. 46).

Most assuredly, the passages quoted prove beyond any doubt that Jesus teaches that there is a place of future retribution for the unbelievers — a hell. But Jesus also tells us that the fate of

those in hell is most terrible. Of this I shall now speak to you in the second place.

2.

According to the words of our dear Savior the fate of those in hell is most terrible. The words used by Him to describe the sufferings of those in hell are the most fearful known to human language. He speaks of hell as the "furnace of fire" (Matt. 13, 42, 50); as the "everlasting fire" (Matt. 18, 8; 25, 41); as a place "where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 8, 12; 22, 13; 24, 51; 25, 30; Luke 13, 28); as a place where "their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9, 43—48). And from our text we may rightly infer that the sufferings of those in hell are both physical and spiritual. Some one has said that "a heartache may be much worse to bear than a toothache"—the soul is capable of more intense suffering than the body. Our dear Savior's anguish of soul in the garden of Gethsemane was greater than His sufferings on the cross, for in Gethsemane His sweat was like drops of blood, falling to the ground. Jesus says of the rich man in hell: "And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in *torments*, and seeth Abraham afar off and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am *tormented* in this flame." But Abraham said, "Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art *tormented*. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us that would come from thence." The rich man said: "I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house, for I have five brethren, that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this *place of torment*."

From these words of our blessed Savior it is evident that those in hell suffer both in body and soul. And oh, how terrible these sufferings are! It would be much better for the lost if they had never been born (Matt. 26, 24).

According to the teachings of Jesus the sufferings of the lost in hell, however, are of different degrees. Not all will suffer alike. The sufferings of some will be more intense than the sufferings of others. The Savior says: "That servant which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according

to His will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes." Luke 12, 47. And for this very reason Jesus up-braided the cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum; for He cried out: "Woe unto thee, Chorazin! Woe unto thee, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the Day of Judgment than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell; for if the mighty works which have been done in thee had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the Day of Judgment than for thee." Matt. 11, 21—24.

According to our Savior's words all unbelievers will be eternally lost, unless they truly repent. Of this I shall now speak to you in the third place.

3.

The rich man was lost, not because he was rich, but because he was an unbeliever. The way the rich man treated poor Lazarus shows that he was an unbeliever. True faith is always accompanied by works of Christian love. Lazarus was a beggar, not from choice, but from necessity, for he was full of sores, which incapacitated him from earning his own bread. Other people had placed him at the gate of the rich man, who "fared sumptuously every day." They thought that such a rich man could and would gladly help such a suffering man as Lazarus was. But they were mistaken, for the rich man took no notice of the suffering beggar. Had the rich man been a believing Christian, he would have provided for Lazarus until he had been healed of his sores, and would have been able to provide for himself.

That the rich man was an unbeliever we see also from what he said to Abraham. He asked Abraham to send Lazarus to his father's house, that he might testify unto his five brothers, "lest they also come into this place of torment." Abraham said to him, "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them." And he said, "Nay, Father Abraham; but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent." But Abraham told him, "If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead." The rich man had given no

heed to Moses and the Prophets, that is, to the sacred Scriptures, given by God through Moses and the prophets. He believed them not. Moses and the prophets had prophesied of the Savior; they had promised eternal life to all who would embrace the promised Savior in true faith. But the rich man believed not the Word of God given through Moses and the prophets. He was self-righteous, as all unbelievers are. He thought, no doubt, that such a respectable and good man as he considered himself to be could not fail of eternal life, and that, therefore, the promised Messiah need not come at all. Had he believed Moses and the Prophets, he certainly would have believed in the promised Messiah, and he would have led a Christian life to prove his faith in Him. Yea, this rich man was not condemned because he was rich, but because he was an unbeliever, a rejecter of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

If we read the New Testament carefully, we shall find that eternal damnation is the lot of those who reject the Savior. Jesus Himself always did say that those who do not believe in Him as their Savior would be eternally lost. To the unbelieving Jews He said: "If ye believe not that I am He," (the Savior of sinful men), "ye shall die in your sins" (John 8, 24); and again He said: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He that believeth on Him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God." John 3, 16—18.

May God grant unto every one of us true faith in Jesus Christ, and finally give us everlasting life for the sake of Jesus Christ, who suffered and died for us on Calvary! Amen.

Second Sunday after Trinity.

1 Sam. 15, 24—31.

And Saul said unto Samuel, I have sinned; for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord, and thy words, because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice. Now therefore, I pray thee, pardon my sin, and turn again with me, that I may worship the Lord. And Samuel said unto Saul, I will not return with thee; for thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord hath rejected thee from being king over Israel. And as Samuel turned about to go away, he laid hold upon the skirt of his mantle, and it rent. And Samuel said unto him, The Lord hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbor of thine, that is better than thou. Also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent; for He is not a man, that He should repent. Then he said, I have sinned; yet honor me now, I pray thee, before the elders of my people, and before Israel, and turn again with me, that I may worship the Lord, thy God. So Samuel turned again after Saul; and Saul worshipped the Lord.

In the Gospel lesson for this Sunday Jesus speaks by a parable. He tells His hearers that a certain man made a great supper, and bade many; and sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, "Come; for all things are now ready." And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said to him: "I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it; I pray thee have me excused." And another said: "I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them; I pray thee have me excused." And still another said: "I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come." What did the man have to say in regard to those men whom he had bidden to partake of his supper when his servant returned and told him what excuses they had made for not coming? He said: "I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper."

The *certain man* in this parable is God Himself. The *great supper* which He had prepared, is eternal salvation. Through His only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, God prepared His great supper for all sinful men, and through His *servants*, the preachers of the Gospel, He invites them all to come and partake of it. And all those who reject His gracious invitation, that is, all those who will not hear, nor accept the Gospel-message, the Lord will also reject, that is, they will be damned forever.

That this is true, we also learn from our text. God rejected King Saul because Saul rejected the word of the Lord, which His servant Samuel had spoken to the king. And every one that follows King Saul in this sin will also be rejected by God. This is, indeed, a most serious truth. Let us, then, beloved friends, now direct our devout attention to the serious truth,—

That it is a Great Sin to Reject the Word of God.

Let me show,

1. *That this is, indeed, a very serious truth, and*
2. *What this serious truth should teach everyone of us.*

1.

“Thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord hath rejected thee.” Thus, beloved friends, Samuel said unto King Saul. It was, indeed, a very serious truth which Samuel had spoken to the first Jewish king.

Saul, the Son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin, was the first king of the Israelites. God Himself had chosen him to be king over His people. Samuel, by the express command of the Lord, had anointed Saul king over the Jews. Saul was a very modest and God-fearing man when God chose him as king over His people. And for a number of years he did that which was pleasing unto God. For this reason the Lord blessed him greatly. With the help of God Saul had subdued almost all of the enemy nations that surrounded the Israelites. When, by the grace of God, Saul had become a very powerful king, he became proud and disobedient unto the Lord. That this is true, we see from the words which precede our text. King Saul departed from the Lord with his heart, though outwardly he worshiped Him. By Samuel God had given Saul the command to destroy the Amalekites with all that they possessed; for thus we read: “Samuel also said unto Saul, The Lord sent me to anoint thee to be king over His people, over Israel; now therefore hearken thou unto the voice of the words of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord of hosts, I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt. Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.” When Samuel had thus spoken unto Saul, the king called together two hundred thousand footmen, and ten thousand men of Judah, which may have been

horsemen, at Telaim to make war upon the Amalekites. Among the Amalekites were found the Kenites, descendants of Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses. The Kenites always had been friendly toward the children of Israel, and for this reason Saul was to spare them. Saul sent word to the Kenites and told them that they should depart from among the Amalekites. They did as Saul had told them to do. Then Saul attacked the Amalekites, and by the help of the Lord he took them. God had enjoined him to destroy all the Amalekites with *all* their wives and children, oxen and sheep, camels and asses. This word of the Lord Saul rejected. He showed disobedience to God by not destroying Agag, the king of the Amalekites, nor the *best* of the sheep, oxen, fatlings, lambs, camels and asses. Saul had wilfully and knowingly transgressed the commandment of the Lord. That was a mortal sin. He had rejected the word of the Lord deliberately, and Samuel said unto him: "*Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, He hath also rejected thee.*" He also told Saul that the Lord had taken his kingdom away from him and had given it to his neighbor, who was better than he, for thus we read in our text: "*And Saul said unto Samuel, I have sinned; for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord, and thy words; because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice. Now, therefore, I pray thee, pardon my sin, and turn again with me, that I may worship the Lord. And Samuel said unto Saul, I will not return with thee; for thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord hath rejected thee from being king over Israel.*" And as Samuel turned about to go away, Saul laid hold upon the skirt of Samuel's mantle, and it rent. And Samuel said unto Saul: "*The Lord hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbor of thine, that is better than thou.*" And Samuel assures King Saul that the Lord will execute His word, for, says he to him: "*The Strength of Israel,*" that is, Jehovah, "*will not lie nor repent; for He is not a man, that He should repent.*" Hereupon King Saul said to Samuel: "I have sinned; yet honor me now, I pray thee, before the elders of my people, and before Israel, and turn again with me, that I may worship the Lord, thy God. So Samuel turned again after Saul; and Saul worshiped the Lord."

From these words it might appear that Saul had truly repented, but he did not. He was not sorry that he had sinned against God, but because he had lost his kingdom and thus be-

come disgraced in the eyes of his people. Samuel went with him because he wanted to give honor to the government which God Himself had established among the Israelites. He knew very well that Saul had not truly repented, and that his worship was nothing than a lip-service. And as we know from the subsequent history of Saul, God fulfilled His word; He rejected Saul, because Saul had rejected His word.

“God is not mocked,” says the holy Apostle Paul. God never changes; He is always the very same, today, yesterday, and forever. As it was then, beloved friends, so it always was. All those who reject God’s commandments, God’s Word, as we have it in the Bible, and do not truly repent, He will, yea, He must, reject, for He is just and righteous. For the very same reason God finally rejected His people, the Israelites. When they flagrantly ignored His Word, He finally destroyed their city, the city of Jerusalem, and those few Jews that survived, He scattered all over the world. God will not, yea, He cannot, let those go unpunished that despise and reject His Word. His word, spoken by Samuel to disobedient Saul, *“Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, He hath also rejected thee,”* stands unmoved to this very day. “Heaven and earth shall pass away,” says the Lord Jesus, “but My words shall not pass away.” Matt. 24,35.

Saul tried to blame the people for his own disobedience, for he said to Samuel: “I have sinned; for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord, and thy words; because *I feared the people, and obeyed their voice.*” But the word of the Lord comes to him, saying: *“Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, He hath also rejected thee.”* Yes, King Saul had rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord therefore also rejected him.

What should this serious and solemn truth teach every one of us, my beloved friends? This question I shall now answer in the second place.

2.

In the first place we should never forget that, if God says anything in His holy Word, He is very serious about it; whatever God says and enjoins, He means with all His heart.

In regard to God’s Word our Catechism says: “We should fear and love God, that we may not despise preaching and His Word; but hold it sacred, and gladly hear and learn it.” That this beautiful answer of our Catechism is in perfect harmony

with the Word of God, we learn from passages, such as these: "He that is of God heareth God's words; ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God." John 8, 47. "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My Word." Is. 66, 2. "Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools; for they consider not that they do evil." Eccl. 5, 1. "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." Col. 3, 16. "Blessed are they that hear the Word of God, and keep it." Luke 11, 28. And many similar passages of Holy Writ tell us the very same thing. And what God says in these and similar passages, He means with all His heart. He does not give us commandments in order that we should disregard them; oh, no; He wants us to remember and do them.

Again He says: "As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live" (Ezek. 33, 11), and, to the preachers especially, He says: "Go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature." Mark 16, 15. "Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." Matt. 28, 19, 20. "Preach the Word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with longsuffering and doctrine." 2 Tim. 4, 2.

From all these passages it is very plain that all preachers should preach nothing but God's Word; they should preach it in all its purity and in its entirety; they should preach it, whether men like or dislike it. Furthermore, it is evident that people should listen only to the preaching of Bible doctrines. That is the will of God. These are very specific commandments to preachers and laity alike. Now, if anyone, be he preacher or layman, disregards the will of God and does not do as God commands him to do, then he rejects the Word of God, and God will reject him.

Oh, what awful judgments are awaiting many of those, who call themselves ministers of the Gospel, but who are not preaching the Gospel. Many so-called preachers of the Gospel are ashamed to preach the straight Gospel of Jesus Christ, or in other words, the doctrines of the Bible in their entirety and purity.

If the daily papers tell the truth about the matter then, beloved friends, there are many churches or congregations that have a Flower-Sunday, a Tuberculosis-Sunday, a Clean-up-Sunday, a Swat-the-fly-Sunday, a Seed-corn-Sunday, a Rusty-nail-Sunday, a Prohibition-Sunday, a Tobacco-Sunday, a Dress-up-Sunday, a Whistle-Sunday, a Kill-the-rat-Sunday, a League-of the-Nations-Sunday, and many others, too numerous to mention. There is hardly a Sunday left on which a Gospel-message can be given to immortal souls. And preachers who observe such Sundays are transgressing the commandment of God, and they are setting aside His will, as King Saul did. To them the word of the Lord goes out: *"Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, He hath also rejected thee."*

"But," say those so-called preachers of the Gospel, "our people insist that we preach on such topics; they want us to do that; they do not want to hear the straight Gospel of Jesus Christ; they do not care for the Bible doctrines." If that be true,—I do not believe that it is true, for most church people want to hear God's Word,—then, beloved friends, the word of the Lord goes out to such people: *"Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, He hath also rejected thee."* It will not help the preachers, nor will it help the people, to blame one another for transgressing the word of the Lord to *preach and to hear His Word*. Whosoever rejects the Word of God, the Lord will also reject. That is what He Himself said that He would do, and He never breaks His word.

Another lesson which this serious and solemn truth should teach preachers and laymen alike, is this: Do what the Lord wants you to do, whether or not it pleases men. People, who have preachers that do not preach the Word of God in its purity, but their own fancies and ideas, should shun them, for the Savior says: "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves." Matt. 7, 15. And again: "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them." Rom. 16.17. And on the other hand, if preachers have members in their congregation who want them to preach anything but the Word of God, the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ, they should not do what they are asked to do, but they should keep on preaching the Word, and nothing but the Word. If they listen to the whimsical and foolish wishes of

some wishy-washy, good-for-nothing "Christians," the word of the Lord to them will be: "*Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, He hath also rejected thee.*" Preachers as well as laymen will the Lord reject, reject forever, if they reject His Word. But if they do not reject His Word, if they hold it sacred, and gladly hear and learn it, He will acknowledge them as His own, and finally He will give them eternal life, for His promise to them is: "*Blessed are they that hear the Word of God, and keep it.*" Luke 11, 28. God's promise is always sure because He cannot lie.

God grant that everyone of us at all times remember the sad fate of King Saul, who at one time was a true and obedient child of God, but fell away from Him rejecting His Word and, therefore, was forever rejected by God, so that we may at all times hold God's Word sacred, and gladly preach, hear, read, and learn it! And in these days of disobedience toward the will and Word of God, may we daily pray with all true Christians:—

Lord Jesus Christ, with us abide,
For round us falls the even-tide;
Let not Thy Word, that heavenly light,
For us be ever veiled in night.

In these last days of sore distress
Grant us, dear Lord, true steadfastness,
That pure we keep, till life is spent,
Thy holy Word and Sacrament.

O grant that in Thy holy Word
We here may live and die, dear Lord;
And when our journey endeth here,
Receive us into glory there.

Amen.

Third Sunday after Trinity.

Luke 15, 11—24.

And He said, A certain man had two sons; and the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat; and no man gave unto him. And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against Heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring hither the fatted calf and kill it; and let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found. And they began to be merry.

The fifteenth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke, from which our text is taken, contains three of the most beautiful parables of our blessed Savior, viz., that of the Lost Sheep, of the Lost Coin, and of the Prodigal Son. All three parables teach two very important lessons, for they tell us of man's sin and God's grace towards sinful men. Jesus spoke all three of them not only as a solemn rebuke to the self-righteous Pharisees and scribes, who murmured against Him, because He joyfully accepted penitent sinners, but also as an encouragement to all penitent sinners to come unto Him so that He might give them rest for their soul and save them from eternal damnation.

The parable of the Prodigal Son to which I would call your devout attention this evening, has often been pronounced the *gem* of all of Jesus' parables, and justly so, for there is none that is as comforting to poor sinners, and none through which more poor sinners have been led to the blessed Savior than this

one. Let us, then, my beloved friends, now direct our attention to—

The Prodigal Son.

I shall show,

1. *How he recklessly abandons his father's house;*
2. *How he remorsefully remembers the abundance in his father's house;*
3. *How he resolves to go back to his father's house;*
4. *How he is joyfully received into his father's house.*

1.

Jesus begins our text, saying: "A certain man had two sons; and the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living."

With these words, beloved friends, Jesus holds up to our view the sad picture of a dissatisfied and wilful youth. The young man enjoyed all the comforts of a good home. He had kind parents who did all for him that they possibly could do. He was in want of nothing. But his parents were pious people, and they did everything within their power to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. They were concerned about the temporal and spiritual welfare of their sons. Whenever they saw their sons do anything against the precepts of God they would kindly admonish them to amend and to walk in the ways of the Lord. But such parental admonition and supervision became irksome to the younger son. He felt that he was no longer in need of such parental supervision and admonition. He considered himself under bondage in his father's house. Legally he had become of age, and, so he thought at least, the authority of his father over him had ceased. And, perhaps, his pastor and some of the older members of his home church would also admonish him at times to walk in the ways of the Lord. All this greatly chagrined the wilful and stubborn youth, and so he made up his mind to put a stop to all this "old foolishness", and go away into a far off country where he should be free to do as he pleased. So one day he came to his father, whom he did not love, but whose money was very dear unto him, and said to him: "Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me." His

father did as he was requested to do, for he divided all his possessions between his two sons. The older one, most probably, received the homestead, and the younger one, money. And not many days afterwards the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far off country, so that his parents and the church people at home should not find out anything of his whereabouts and doings. He did not want those "old fogies" to bother him any longer. On the wings of youthful folly he soars away. He considers himself a "free man" at last. He finds lots of jolly boys and giddy girls in the country to which he had gone, and they become his very best chums. No father is there to admonish him! No mother to shed tears over his sinful ways! No preacher to prick his conscience! Indeed, he now "enjoys life immensely," and he is convinced that he is the happiest youth in all the world. Yes, he had recklessly abandoned his father's house! He was of the opinion that he had acted very wisely, but in reality he had acted very foolishly. What he considered to be great wisdom and smartness was nothing less than gross folly and foolishness. Poor boy!

There are thousands upon thousands of people living in this world this very day that have done what this dissatisfied and wilful youth did! They have recklessly abandoned their father's house and have become castaways; criminals; inmates of insane asylums, reformatories, and penitentiaries.

But, my friends, we must not overlook the fact that Jesus is speaking by a parable in our text. What the younger son had done in a physical manner, untold numbers have done in a spiritual way: they have recklessly abandoned their Father's house; they have turned their backs upon their God and Savior, His Church, and His Word, and have joined the ranks of the worldlings. Church statistics prove that many thousands of those who at one time have been baptized and confirmed, have left the Christian Church and the fellowship of true Christians, and have turned their backs upon the saving Gospel. The Gospel of Jesus Christ they consider as being "dry and stale," and the fellowship of the true Christians "dull and stupid," and the beneficial restraints of the Word of God "unreasonable and overbearing." They wished to be free to do as it pleases their sinful flesh. They found pleasure in the giddy, lewd, and sinful amusements of the worldlings, and so they abandoned their Father's house, that is, turned their backs upon the dear Savior, His Church, and His

Word. Yea, even many of those whose names are still on the church-roll have done the very same thing, for their heart is far from the Lord. They are only outwardly connected with the Christian Church, for they do not truly believe in Jesus Christ as their one and only Savior and they do not serve Him with a willing and cheerful heart. O poor, deluded people that they are! O that all of them might learn to realize their spiritual folly while they are serving the devil, as the prodigal son did. After he had recklessly abandoned his father's house, and had "immensely enjoyed" the pleasure of this sinful world and was in great want, he saw his folly and he remorsefully remembered the abundance in his father's house.

2.

Jesus says of the prodigal son: "And he took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat; and no man gave unto him. And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!"

For a while all went well with the wayward youth. He had plenty of money, and lots of friends who helped him to spend it. He simply squandered his money. The Savior tells us that he *wasted his substance with riotous living*. But finally his money gave out. And when he had spent all of his money, the harlots no longer cared for him; his drinking companions shunned him; he had lost all of his "friends." And to make matters still worse, a mighty famine arose in that country. He was in great danger of starving to death. So he joined himself to a citizen of that land, and became a herder of swine. He got very little to eat. He desired the food that the swine got, that is, husks, the pods of a wild fruit, that of the carob-tree; but he could not even get them, for no man gave unto him, that is, he was watched by his master, so that he could not even get them by stealth. Indeed, a great change had taken place! The son of a wealthy father, who had been accustomed to all the comforts of a good home, who never had known any wants, was now a castaway in a far off

country; a ragged beggar; friendless and penniless. He had recklessly abandoned his father's house, and now receives the wages of sin. O how he must suffer in body and mind because of his youthful follies! He remorsefully remembers the good things he enjoyed while he was in his father's house.

The lot of this prodigal son is the lot of untold numbers even to this very day. By their sins they have not only been undone in a physical way, but even more so in a spiritual manner. Many former Christians have left the house of their Father, have turned their backs upon His Church and His Word, and they are now forsaken by God and man. They also remember the good things which they enjoyed while they were yet true Christians. They remember their blessed estate in bygone days. They think of the spiritual bliss and happiness which they enjoyed while they were members of the Church of Jesus Christ. How the Gospel-sermons used to comfort them in all their trials and afflictions! How the fellowship of true Christians used to cheer them! How blessed they were when they approached the Lord's Table for the strengthening of their faith! Yes, they remorsefully remember the abundance in the house of their heavenly Father which in former days they enjoyed. O how happy they were! The peace of God was in their soul, which the world cannot give! But now they are miserably wretched! Oh, that all such would resolve to go back to the house of the heavenly Father!

3.

Jesus says of the prodigal son: "And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants."

The prodigal son waited to the very last before he made up his mind to go back to his father's house, and ask his father for forgiveness. He made this resolution very reluctantly. Why? There was, perhaps, more than one reason for this. It may be that he had not given up all hopes to get along himself without humiliating himself before his father and his kinsfolk, otherwise he would not have degraded himself to the position of a herder of swine. A Jew knew no greater degradation than to be a herder of swine. But it may also be that he was ashamed to go back to

his father, whom he had so recklessly abandoned. But finally he had to go back or starve. There was no other way out of his dilemma. By all means, his pride was now broken, and his unruliness had vanished, and his stubbornness had given place to a contrite spirit. Yes, he realized more and more that he had grossly sinned against God and his father. The Word of God which he had learned while he was at home, now began to do its blessed work; it brought him to true repentance. So he now was resolved to go to his father and make a full confession. As a truly penitent sinner he does not put the blame upon others, but upon himself. Yes, he now sees the awfulness of his sin. He realizes that he is not worthy to be called a son of his father any longer. But perhaps, his good father will at least accept him as one of his hired servants!

There are always many in outer Christendom who realize the sinfulness and wickedness of their ways; but not all of them do what the prodigal son did: not all resolve to go back to their Father's house and ask for forgiveness. No, many despair as Cain and Judas Iscariot did and are eternally lost. Oh, that all of those who realize their sins may do what the prodigal son did! Oh, that all might repent of their sins and go to their heavenly Father and ask Him to forgive them their sins for His Son's, Jesus Christ's, sake! Surely, they will not be disappointed, for He will do what the father of the prodigal son did: He will receive them with a joyful heart.

4.

Jesus tells us of the prodigal son that he *arose and came to his father*. What kind of a reception awaited him at home? Listen! Jesus says: "But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against Heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." He had said within himself that he also wanted to tell his father, "Make me as one of they hired servants"; but this he did not do. Why not? He had no opportunity to do so, for his father interrupted him in his confession, and calling a servant or two, said unto them: "Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring hither the fatted calf and kill it; and let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead and is

alive again; he was lost and is found. And they began to be merry." Indeed, a reception, such as the son had not at all anticipated! His good father had not changed in the least. He had waited from day to day for the return of his wayward boy. The mother, so it seems, had passed away. She had gone down to her grave with a broken heart, because her son had thus dealt with them. Yea, father and son were again united. And with what willingness and cheerfulness that son must henceforth have served his good and gracious father! Yes, 'twas true what his father had said: "This my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!"

Perhaps there are some here now who have departed from the house of their heavenly Father, that is, who have backslidden. The fact is that every time we commit a sin wilfully and knowingly, we backslide. Perhaps there are some here now who have given themselves to the sinful pleasures and ways of this wicked and unbelieving world, and are serving the devil and sin with a willing heart. If they return not to their Father's house in true penitence, they will finally receive the wages of sin: death; eternal damnation. Oh, that they might retrace their steps in this very hour! Oh, that they might go back to their heavenly Father right now and ask Him for forgiveness. Oh, that they might go just as they are! He will accept them with a joyful heart, and all the holy angels will be exceedingly glad, for the Savior Himself has said: "I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." Therefore:—

Come home! Come home!
There is bread and to spare,
And a warm welcome there.
Then to friends reconciled,
O prodigal child, come home!
Amen.

Fourth Sunday after Trinity.

John 14, 27.

Peace I leave with you, My peace I give you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you.

In the Gospel-lesson for this Sunday Jesus lifts up His voice against the great sin of unjust fault-finding. The sin of unjust fault-finding is very common among men, even among people who would be true Christians. This sin is the real cause of so much hatred of men towards each other. Where this sin is not checked, there you cannot expect to find peace and unity among men.

The parent of fault-finding is, as a rule, jealousy. Jealousy is also a great sin. Jealousy among the divers nations very often causes war and bloodshed.

In the 133rd Psalm King David cries out: "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" Indeed, it is a very good and pleasant thing for people to dwell together in unity, in peace. Unity, peace among men is a great boon. It is good and pleasant to live in a community in which the people dwell together in peace! What a blessing it would be for the whole world, if all the different nations would shun jealousies and unjust fault-finding and live together in love and peace!

Many people, that is, all true Christians, would like to bring about peace among the divers nations of this world. But this goal can not be reached, unless all people become followers of the Prince of Peace, that is, true disciples of Jesus Christ. Jesus alone can give that peace which will insure a world-peace among the nations. It is to this blessed peace that I now wish to call your devout attention, my beloved friends. By the assistance of the Holy Spirit, and in accordance with our text, let me, then, now speak to you of:—

The Peace Which Jesus Christ Offers to a Peaceless World.

Let me show,

1. *What kind of peace it is, and*
2. *To whom He gives it.*

The Prince of Peace says in our text: "*Peace I leave with you. My peace I give you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you.*"

These words of our text our dear Savior spoke to His beloved disciples in His so-called fare-well address in the night in which He was betrayed by His Apostle Judas Iscariot. Jesus had gathered His apostles about Him in an upper room of a house in the city of Jerusalem. Here He celebrated the Jewish Passover with them, and instituted His Supper,—the Sacrament of the Altar. He had repeatedly spoken to them of the work of redemption which He was to accomplish for a lost sinner-world. And even now He spoke to them of His bitter sufferings and ignominious death. The Eleven became very sorrowful at what Jesus told them. Their minds had become agitated and the peace of their soul had vanished, especially when they had seen Judas sneak out of the room. This Jesus knew, for He saw what transpired in the hearts of His beloved apostles. He felt very sorry for them. He could not retrace His steps, for then the great and blessed work of the world's redemption would have been stayed. But He wanted to comfort His sorrowing disciples. Therefore He said unto them: "*Peace I leave with you. My peace I give you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you.*"

When Jesus says: "My peace I give you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you"; He wants everyone to know that the peace of which He is speaking and which He is able to give, is foreign to the wicked world; the world cannot give it.

What kind of a peace is it of which Jesus speaks? It is that peace in which man was originally created. When Adam and Eve came forth out of the creative hand of God they were the most peaceful creatures on earth. They were at perfect peace with God and with each other. God had created them in perfect righteousness and holiness, or as the Bible expresses it, in His own image. They spoke with God as loving children speak with a beloved parent. They had no slave-like fear of the Lord, for they realized that they were the well-beloved children of the heavenly Father. They were blessed beyond all human imagination. And, besides, there was no disharmony between man and the lower creatures, as is now the case. The whole visible world dwelt together in unity and peace. O the blessed estate in which

man was when he had come forth out of the creative hand of God!

But this blessed state of perfect peace was soon destroyed by the Fall. Adam and Eve left their first estate, for they transgressed the commandment of the Lord, and thus they became sinners. As soon as they had fallen into sin, they no longer had peace with God; their own heart condemned them, and they therefore feared God with a slavish fear, for we are told that, when God came to them after their fall, they hid themselves among the trees of the Garden of Eden, that beautiful and lovely paradise in which they dwelt. Yea, by their deplorable fall into sin they had lost the peace of God. They now had become God's enemies. If it had been within their power, they, undoubtedly, would have concealed themselves from the face of the Lord forever, for they now dreaded Him, whose presence formerly was their greatest delight. Yes, the Fall changed man's estate towards God most dreadfully.

But thanks to the gracious and merciful God! For what did He do? He came to fallen man and made a gracious promise unto him. What did He promise? He promised a Savior. This Savior was to restore the peace which had been lost by the Fall. And when the fulness of time was come, God did send forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the Law, to redeem them that were under the Law, that they might receive the adoption of sons (Gal. 4, 4. 5). The Son of God, Jesus Christ, fulfilled the divine Law perfectly for fallen mankind, and gave Himself a ransom for the sins of the world. By His bitter sufferings and death upon the cross He reconciled all sinful men to God, and thus He established peace between His Father and sinful mankind. That He should do this, even the holy angels had declared when, in the night of His nativity, they sang that wonderful Christmas carol into the ears and hearts of the lowly shepherds on the plains of Bethlehem, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." Luke 2, 14. Indeed, Jesus Christ, the Savior of the sinful world, has established peace between God and fallen men, God's enemies. And all those sinners that believe this have the peace of God in their heart, for they know that they are God's children by faith in Jesus Christ. They fear no punishment at the hands of God, because they know that God is at peace with them, and that He will take them unto Himself into the realms of eternal peace.

It is this peace in the heart of a poor penitent sinner with God of which Jesus is speaking in our text, and which He gave to His beloved disciples when they were so peaceless.

As soon as this peace of God enters the soul of a sinner, he becomes a different person,—a new creature, a new man. The peace of God generates true peace among those who have it. It is, indeed, a most wonderful thing,—this peace of God! It is, and it always will remain a great mystery to all rational beings throughout eternity, for it is incomprehensible to any rational mind how the holy and just God could reconcile a lost sinner-world with Himself by sending His only-begotten Son to become the propitiation for it. This peace of God will be, throughout eternity, the theme of celestial doxologies of all the saints and all the holy angels.

To whom does Jesus give this peace of God? This question I shall now answer in the second place.

2.

"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you." Thus Jesus spoke to His apostles in the night in which He was betrayed. And, again, after His glorious resurrection, He greeted them with these words: "Peace be unto you." (John 20, 19. 21. 26).

This peace was not an outward peace at all, but the peace of God in the hearts of the disciples. Jesus wanted to fill the hearts of His disciples with the peace of God, that is, He wanted them to be certain of the fact that His Father in heaven was at peace with them; that He had forgiven them all their sins for His sake.

What kind of men were the disciples of Jesus Christ whom He blessed with the peace of God?

In the first place, beloved friends, they were sinful men. Like all other men, they too, had been conceived and born in sin. And this they realized. It was not with them as it is with so many men! Very many men, yea, most men, do not realize that they are by nature lost and condemned sinners, who deserve nothing but God's wrath and displeasure, temporal death, and eternal damnation. And, consequently, they have no longing for the forgiveness of their sins; they do not ask, What must we do to be at peace with God? This question was uppermost in the hearts of the disciples of Jesus Christ. They realized that, on

account of their great and manifold transgressions of God's Law. they had merited nothing but His wrath and punishments. They had a desire to receive forgiveness of their sins and to be at peace with God. They were ready to sacrifice everything they had, if they only were made sure of God's peace with them.

In the second place, the disciples believed in the Son of God, that is, they believed that God had sent His only-begotten Son into this world in order to redeem and save sinful mankind. Therefore Jesus assures them of the fact that they have nothing whatever to fear from God; that He had indeed forgiven them all their sins for His sake, because He would suffer and die for them as well as for all sinners; that they could be certain that His Father was now at peace with them; that they were God's beloved children through faith in Him. This it was, what Jesus meant when He said unto them: "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you." And it was the very same thing He wished to tell them when, after His glorious resurrection, He saluted them with these words: "Peace be unto you!"

Thus it is to this very day, my beloved friends. Those people, who realize that they are lost and condemned sinners in themselves, and that they therefore have deserved nothing but God's wrath and displeasure, temporal death, and eternal damnation on account of their transgressions, and who are truly sorry on account of their sins and would like to get rid of them, are the very ones whom the dear Savior gives the peace of God. Unto these His message goes forth: "Peace be unto you"; for I have appeased the wrath of My Father over sin by the shedding of My precious blood; My Father will accept you as His dear children for My sake; therefore be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven unto you! And all those who believe this message of peace, will realize that the peace of God fills their heart. The answer to the all-important question, To whom will Jesus give the peace of God? is, To those who come to Him as truly penitent sinners, that is, as sinners that are sorry on account of their sins and put all their trust for the forgiveness of their sins in the Savior.

But why does Jesus give the peace of God only to the truly penitent sinners? I answer, Because they are the only ones to whom He can give it. All impenitent sinners repulse the Savior with His peace-message; they close their hearts against the peace

which He gives. It is their own fault, therefore, that they do not receive it. *He* would give it unto them, but *they* will not have it; they despise and reject the Savior and the peace which He alone is able and willing to give.

As soon as the peace of God enters the heart of a sinner, so soon he becomes a different person. This is most wonderful; but it is, nevertheless, very true. The faith, that God is gracious unto poor sinners for His Son's sake, changes the heart of natural man; it creates a new spirit within him. He now loves his God and Savior, and for His sake he also loves his fellow-men, even his enemies. Everyone who is at peace with God, is also at peace with his fellow-men and fellow-Christians.

That this is true, we see from the disciples of Jesus. They went out into all the world and preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ, or the peace-message. It was love unto the Savior and their fellow-men which prompted them to go everywhere with the peace-message of Jesus. Even though they were derided and persecuted they, nevertheless, kept on proclaiming the Gospel, until they finally suffered a martyr's death. Look at Stephen and other disciples of Jesus! They were hated and persecuted unto death, but they loved their haters and persecutors. Stephen, while he was dying, prayed for his murderers. Look at the Christian martyrs of the first three centuries of the Christian era! They were hated and persecuted by both Jews and Gentiles. They were burnt at the stake; they were thrown to ferocious beasts; they were racked, yea, they were murdered in the most cruel manners which diabolical ingenuity could invent, but, nevertheless, they did not hate their persecutors, but they prayed for them. How was that possible, my dear friends? That was possible, because the peace of God was in their heart and filled them with true love toward all men. You cannot find one instance in the whole history of mankind which shows that the true Christians made war upon their fellow-men. It was only after Christianity had become perverted by the Roman popes, that so-called Christians made war upon their fellow-men. If all people were *true* Christians there would be no wars in this world. The nations that were at war with each other during the last decade were not truly Christian nations. Had they been what they claim to be, — truly Christian nations, there never would have been a World War.

The only way to establish a world peace, therefore, is by

making all nations unto true disciples of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace. As long as this is not accomplished, it is futile to speak of world peace. If the billions upon billions of dollars which were spent for wars would have been spent in spreading the Gospel or peace-message of Jesus Christ among the divers nations of this world, then, beloved friends, war and bloodshed among men would not be so general, as they are. If we want wars and bloodshed to cease among men, we must by all means *Christianize*, not simply *civilize*, the divers nations.

It is, indeed, true that the whole world never will be Christianized, for the Savior Himself has said that in the latter days there will be a great falling away from faith, and there will be wars and rumors of wars. The world is not growing better, as sophists try to make us believe, but it is growing worse from year to year, and finally, when its measure of unbelief and wickedness is full, the almighty Lord Jesus will come in His glory and destroy it. And those, who have the peace of God in their heart, will He take with Himself into life everlasting. All the rest will be forever damned in hell. That is what the Bible teaches. Whatever the Bible says is absolutely true, because it is the Word of the veracious God.

May God in His mercy grant unto everyone of us true faith in Jesus Christ, the one and only Savior of sinful mankind, and thus fill our hearts with the peace of God which abides forever! Amen.

Fifth Sunday after Trinity.

John 8, 12.

Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the Light of the world; he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

Moses begins the Book of Genesis with these words: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light; and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day."

The light which God created in the beginning by the power of His word, we call *natural light*. This light illuminates this world. Without this natural light we simply could not exist.

It is true, that man can produce *artificial light* by means of oil, gas, and electricity; but artificial light would be of no use to us if there were no natural light, for without the natural light which God created in the beginning, and which He, most probably, on the fourth day concentrated in the sun, we could not live, because without the light of the sun nothing could be produced by the earth; there could be no sustaining of life without the sun, except by the miraculous working of the almighty God. Without rain and sunshine the very necessities of this life would be wanting.

By the natural light *natural darkness* is dispelled, but neither the natural, nor artificial light has the power to do away with *spiritual darkness*; they cannot illuminate the dark hearts of sinful men unto everlasting life; they cannot show unto them the way to eternal happiness. Spiritual darkness can only be dispelled by spiritual light. And glory and thanks be unto the good and gracious Lord, for there is spiritual light which can and does overcome spiritual darkness! Of this spiritual light the dear Savior speaks in our text. This spiritual light, in the narrower sense, is Jesus Christ Himself, but in the broader sense it is His saving Gospel. Whosoever embraces Jesus Christ as his Savior by true faith, as Peter and his associates did, of whom our to-day's Gospel-lesson tells us, is in possession of the spiritual light,

and he shall not walk in darkness, but in the light. In accordance with our text, and by the assistance of the Holy Spirit, let me now speak to you of —

Jesus Christ, the Light of the World.

Whosoever follows Him,

1. *Shall not walk in darkness, but*
2. *Shall have the light of life.*

1.

As we learn from the first chapter of Genesis there was only chaos and gross darkness until God created light and all things by the power of His word, for Moses tells us that the earth was "without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep." There was only gross darkness, confusion and emptiness: *chaos*. Out of this chaos God made a wonderful and beautiful universe: heaven and earth. And into this beautiful and wonderful world God placed man and his helpmeet. For a while everything was most lovely. But what happened? Man, who had been created in the image of God, that is, in perfect holiness and righteousness, or without sin, fell away from God, and thus became a sinner, an enemy of God. By the awful fall into sin man's spiritual condition became chaos. Spiritual chaos is to this very day the sad condition of natural or unconverted man and, therefore, the great Prophet Isaiah cried out: "For, behold, darkness covers the earth, and gross darkness the people!" Is. 60, 2. This *darkness* of which the prophet spoke is, as we know from the Word of God, nothing else than unbelief, superstition, and sin. In order to save fallen mankind from its awful condition, the Son of God came into this sinful world and became true man, yet without sin, for His conception was wrought by the miraculous working of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1, 35). When, therefore, after His birth of the Virgin Mary Jesus was brought into the Temple, old Simeon took Him upon his arms and jubilantly cried out, saying; "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word; for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people, a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel." Luke 2, 29—32. Indeed, Jesus Christ is the Light of the world, for He Himself says in our text that He is the Light of the world, and He assures us that, whosoever follows Him, shall not walk in darkness, for thus we read: "Then spake Jesus again unto

them, saying, *I am the Light of the world; he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness.*"

Whosoever follows Jesus Christ, the Light of the world, shall not walk in darkness. What, then, beloved friends, does it mean to *follow* Jesus Christ? To follow Him means, to believe in Him as the only Savior of sinful mankind; to believe that He suffered and died for all sinful men to save them from sin, death, and damnation. Whosoever does not believe this with all his heart, does not follow Jesus Christ, and everyone who does not follow Jesus Christ walks in darkness, that is, in unbelief, superstition, and sin. It cannot be otherwise, because Jesus Christ is the Light of the world. All those who walk not in this Light, are spiritually blind and grope in spiritual darkness. The imagination of their hearts is evil; their intellect is perverted; their will is contrary to the will of God. St. Paul wrote nothing but truth, when he wrote to the Corinthians: "The natural (unconverted) man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." 1 Cor. 2, 14. All unconverted people are idolaters and slaves of sin; they do the works of darkness; they find pleasure in all kinds of sin, such as adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like (Gal. 5, 19—21). Those who do not truly believe in Jesus Christ and, therefore, do not follow Him, are in the kingdom of darkness, that is, in the kingdom of the devil, and for this very reason they willingly and cheerfully do the works of darkness. And all the wisdom of this world, all worldly learning, cannot liberate them from the thrall-dom of Satan, nor from the dominion of sin. This fact no one will deny who has read the history of the world. St. Paul has given us a true report of all those who follow not Jesus Christ. Read his various Epistles, especially, the first chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, and you will at once see that all those who follow not Jesus Christ, are given to idolatry, and wallow in all kinds of sins and vices. Even the most learned among them are no better than the illiterate savages. Look, for example, to the highly cultured Greeks and Romans! Even the most learned among them, their great philosophers, and their great leaders in times of peace and war, walked in spiritual darkness; they were all slaves of unbelief, superstition, and sin. A Plato, a Demos-

thenes, a Solon, a Homer, a Socrates, an Alexander the Great, a Julius Caesar, and many others of equal learning and world-leadership, were nothing else than worshipers of idols and slaves of their passions; they groped in spiritual darkness until temporal death came and plunged them into eternal darkness, into hell. And thus it is to this day. All those who do not follow the Light of the world, Jesus Christ, are walking in spiritual darkness. All their secular knowledge, all their philosophy, all their worldly wisdom cannot free them from the dominion of sin. Look across the great oceans to the right and to the left! Look to the highly civilized nations of Europe and to the semi-civilized peoples of the Orient, and what will you behold? Nothing but unbelief, superstition, and iniquity. Yea, the highly cultured nations of Europe that have made manifold inventions of far-reaching benefits to mankind,—have they not turned brutes, notwithstanding all their worldly wisdom? Why is it that even now, after peace has been proclaimed for almost six years, there is no real peace, but a condition that is by far worse than war itself? Why all that brutish hatred? Why all this inhuman conduct? There is but one true answer to all these questions. Which? They have not Jesus Christ, the Light of the world. Their Higher Critics and Evolutionists have exchanged Jesus and His Gospel for the gods of Materialism, Evolutionism, and Bolshevism. What a chaos in church and state in almost all of the European countries! What a chain of superstition and works of darkness surrounds the vast dominions of the Orient! Chaos everywhere. Why? Because Jesus Christ, the Light of the world, is wanting. There is science galore, at least science so called, but there is no fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of all true wisdom. Generally speaking, the highly cultured nations of Europe have discarded true Christianity for Materialism; the saving Gospel of the Bible for the tenets of Evolutionism; and the sure Word of God for the hypotheses of human brains. That is the true reason, my beloved friends, why they are walking in spiritual darkness. Yes, it is undeniably true what Jesus says in our text: *"I am the Light of the world; he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness."* Oh, that all of us might beware of Materialism and Evolutionism, these Satanic twins, that have already ruined the once Christian countries of Europe! Oh, that we Lutheran Christians at least might beware, lest Jesus Christ and His saving Gospel be lost to us and to our children! Whoso-

ever will not follow Jesus Christ, the Light of the world, will at last land in the abyss of eternal darkness. Spiritual darkness cannot be dispelled nor overcome by worldly learning and wisdom; it cannot be dispelled nor overcome by the sciences, nor by philosophy. All worldly-wise and highly cultured people walk in spiritual darkness as long as they have not and follow not Jesus Christ. Only when, and as long as, they follow Jesus, *"they shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."* This fact I wish to impress upon your hearts and minds in the second place.

2.

Jesus says in our text: *"I am the Light of the world; he that follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."* With these words Jesus tells us that whosoever has Him, *has the light of life.*

What does He mean by the *light of life*? By the light of life, which he possesses who has the Light of the world, true faith in Jesus Christ is understood. That this is true, we see from John 12, 46, where Jesus says: "I am come a Light into the world, that whosoever believeth in Me should not abide in darkness." The spiritually dark heart of a man becomes enlightened through faith in Jesus Christ. Whenever the Holy Ghost works faith in Jesus Christ in the heart of a sinful man, either by Baptism or by the Gospel, then He enlightens his heart with saving knowledge unto life everlasting. And from that very moment such an enlightened person is in possession of the light of life; he is a changed person, for it is written: "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." 2 Cor. 5, 17. Yes, through faith in Jesus Christ man becomes a new creature. He has a different mind than he formerly had, and his will is no longer what it was formerly. Whatsoever he loved before he became converted, he now hates. While before his conversion he was given to idolatry and unbelief, he now has embraced Jesus Christ as his Savior; while he formerly was under the dominion of sin and his sinful passions, he now is master over them, and he serves Him who has bought him with His holy and precious blood; while he formerly trusted in himself and in his fellows, he now trusts in God and his Savior, and walks as it becometh a child of God; he leads a truly Christian life in order to glorify Him, who has transplanted him out of the kingdom of darkness into His glorious kingdom of

light and life. Yea, all his thoughts, words, and deeds prove that he is no longer what he formerly was; that he is a changed person; that he walks in light. And for this very reason the Savior Himself says of all true Christians, of all true believers in Him, that they are the light of the world (Matt. 5, 14); and He admonishes them to let their light shine before men that they may see their good works, and glorify their Father in heaven (Matt. 5, 16). And St. Paul says unto all Christians, that is, to all who have the light of life, the true faith in Jesus Christ in their heart: "Walk as children of light." Eph. 5, 9. Yes, all those who have embraced Jesus Christ by true faith and cling to Him by true faith, are children of light, because they have the light of life, and walk in light, lead a truly Christian life.

That this is true is evident, my beloved friends. Look at the heathen people and at the unbelievers in our own country! As soon as they become enlightened by the Gospel of Jesus Christ they are changed. Christian missionaries who went to the *canibals*, that is, to the man-eating savages, with the Gospel of Jesus Christ performed wonders through their preaching of the Gospel, for they made Christians out of them, so that even Darwin had to admit the miraculous power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And let me call your attention to a few examples which the Bible presents! Look at *Saul of Tarsus*, that self-righteous Pharisee and persecutor of the early Christians! What a great change we behold in this man after he had become converted! He became the greatest apostle of Him, whom he had hated with all the fibers of his Pharisaic heart, and a loving fellow of those, whom he had so mercilessly persecuted. Again, look at that miser in Jericho, *Zacchaeus*! As soon as his heart became enlightened by the Gospel-preaching of Jesus of Nazareth, he was an altogether different man. The miser and cheater had become a generous Christian; he let his light shine before his fellow-men so that they could see his good works by which he proved his faith in Jesus. Thus it always has been, and thus it always will be. As soon as a person is truly converted by the preaching of the Gospel of the crucified and resurrected Savior of the world, so soon he is a changed person according to mind and will. Wherever the saving Gospel of Jesus is preached and taught there the effects of such Gospel-preaching are seen, for it effects a great change in the hearts of all who accept it by true faith. They no longer walk in darkness, but in light; they no longer

serve any idols, but the true God, and they serve Him willingly and cheerfully according to their ability, as the Lord has given them grace and strength; they shun evil, and do that which is good and acceptable unto the Lord; they carry their cross with a patient heart, and thus they glorify the Lord.

What sinful men need most of all in this world is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But, sad to say, this many will not admit and, therefore, they despise and reject the saving Gospel. Even to this very day it is true what Jesus said to Nicodemus: "God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved. He that believeth on Him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God." John 3, 16—21. Nicodemus accepted Jesus by true faith, and the light of life (faith) warmed his heart for the Savior, so that he served Him willingly and cheerfully, and finally it led him through the dark shadow of the valley of temporal death into the light everlasting. Yes, indeed, it is true what Jesus says in our text: "*I am the Light of the world; he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.*" God grant that we accept Jesus and cling to Him! Amen.

Sixth Sunday after Trinity.

Phil. 3, 3—9.

For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more. Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee: concerning zeal, persecuting the Church, touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the Law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.

Should a man change his religion? Most people, even many so-called Christians, say that he should not. They will say, "Let people alone that have some kind of a religion, for all religions are good; if people will only live up to their religion, they will be eternally saved." Many so-called Christian people argue against foreign missions by saying, that the heathen people can be saved as well as the Christians, if they are only sincere in following the tenets of their religion.

Is this true, my beloved friends? Is it true that all religions can save, if people are only sincere in living up to them? Is it true that it is best for everyone to hold on to his religion until death takes him out of this world? Should no man change his religion?

In the Gospel-lesson for this Sunday, which is taken from the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells His audience: "For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." With these words Jesus condemns the religion of the Pharisees and scribes. He tells His audience that the religion of the Pharisees and scribes cannot save anyone from sin, death, and eternal damnation. If the religion of the scribes and Pharisees could have saved sinful men, Jesus would not have spoken those solemn words at all. If sinful men could be saved by *any* religion, if they will only live up to it, then the Pharisees and scribes would have been saved, for they were very

sincere in following the tenets of their religion. But Jesus says that if sinful men have not a better religion than the Pharisees and scribes had, they cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven. There were also Pharisees and scribes among His hearers. Jesus therefore told them that they must *change* their religion or be *eternally lost*.

People that say that a man must never change his religion err; they are all wrong, for it is a downright lie to say that every religion is good and able to save sinners from eternal damnation. My dear friends, the fact is that there is but *one* religion which is able to save sinful men, and this one religion is the *Christian* religion. All other religions lead men into hell. It is, therefore, incorrect to say that a man should never change his religion; that the non-Christians could be saved as well as the true Christians. Our text tells us of a great and learned man who changed his religion. This man was Saul of Tarsus. Why, then, did he change his religion? That is the important question which I now wish to answer by the assistance of the Holy Spirit.

Why Did Saul of Tarsus Change His Religion?

I answer,

1. *Because he became persuaded of the fact that the religion of the Pharisees and scribes could not save sinful men, and*
2. *Because he was made sure of the fact that the true Christian religion is the only saving religion in this world.*

1.

Historians and explorers tell us that, so far as is known, no people ever have been found in this world that were without some kind of religion. That is indeed true, for all human beings are religious by nature. Man is a *religious* being. Man *must* be a religious being. Why? Because God Himself has written His Law into the heart of every man. That this is a fact, we see from the undeniable truth that all men have a conscience. Every being that has a conscience is and must be a religious being. Of course, not all men are religious in the same degree, but they are all religious, more or less.

Saul of Tarsus, a very learned man, was very religious; extremely religious. He was a scribe,* belonging to the sect of

* The learned among the Pharisees were called *scribes* or *doctors*.
20 Hart. Sermon.

the Pharisees. He was a Jew by birth and training. He belonged to the Jewish church. There were three distinct sects within the Jewish church in those days, namely, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Essenes. That Saul of Tarsus was a Pharisee, he himself tells us in our text, for he says to himself: "*Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee.*"

What kind of religion, then, did the Pharisees have? The Pharisees believed that they must be saved by keeping the commandments of God and the commandments of the fathers of the Jewish church. Their religious code consisted of 613 distinct commandments, most of these were commandments of men. They believed that they could keep all the commandments perfectly, and thus they could be saved by their own works. They trusted in themselves, or, as our text expresses it, they put their *confidence in the flesh*. That is what Saul of Tarsus did. He trusted in himself, in his own works and merits. He was very upright in following the tenets of Pharisaism. He says in our text, "*As touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the Church; touching the righteousness which is in the Law, blameless.*" But Saul of Tarsus had no idea of the true *spirit* of the Law of God. Like all Pharisees he imagined that it is possible for men to keep the Law. He had no idea that even evil thoughts and desires in the heart of man are damnable sins in the sight of God. He, like all the Pharisees, considered only the gross outbursts against the divine Law sinful. And when the holy apostles of Jesus Christ preached that no man could keep the Law as God would have him keep it, and that therefore no man could be saved by the works of the Law, but only through faith in Christ Jesus, the one and only Redeemer of sinful men, Saul of Tarsus became enraged against them and began to persecute

tors of the Law. Saul of Tarsus was a doctor of the Law or a scribe. He had received his training at the university of the Jews in the city of Jerusalem, under that well-known and world-renowned savant Gamaliel (Acts 22, 3), the most learned and just of all the Jewish doctors of the Law (Acts 5, 34—40). *Josephus* tells us that in the time of our dear Savior there were about 6,000 Pharisees, that is, men who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees. In reality there were by far more. The Jews in general, were Pharisees in *spirit*. They were a self-satisfied and self-righteous people. They, as a rule, trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised other nations.

them and all the Christians. As you know, my beloved fellow-Christians, he was the leader of the mob that stoned Stephen to death. And after he had persecuted the apostles and other Christians in the city of Jerusalem, he went to Damascus in order to persecute the Christians in that ancient city.

But what happened? On the way to Damascus Jesus appeared unto Saul of Tarsus and said to him: "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" Saul asked: "Who art Thou, Lord?" Jesus said unto him: "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest." Acts 9, 4. 5. Saul became convinced that Jesus was not dead, but alive; that He had truly raised Himself up from death, and that therefore the apostles of Jesus had been preaching nothing but the truth. He began to think. And he became persuaded that, Jesus being the Savior, His sufferings and death must have been necessary for the redemption of the sinful world. And the more he thought about the matter, the more he became convinced that he held a false religion, and that his religion could not save him.

The religion of the Pharisees, that is, the religion that teaches that man can save himself by his own efforts, his own good works, is the *natural* religion. All men by nature believe that they can save themselves by their works, by their own merits. That is what all heathen believe and teach. This false doctrine is also held by the modern Jews, by the Mohammedans, by the Unitarians, Universalists, Christian Scientists, Russellites, Mormons, Evolutionists, Freemasons,* Modernists, and many, many others. Yes,

* Volume XVI of the *Universal Masonic Library* contains thirteen sermons which were preached by the Rev. Jethro Inwood to Freemasons. The preacher preached Jesus Christ and Him crucified, as the one and only Savior. The editor of volume XVI, the Rev. George Oliver, D. D., says in a footnote, page 46: "Throughout the whole of these sermons it will be found that the science of Freemasonry is blended with Christianity.... Brother Inwood had studied Freemasonry only through its lectures; and, at the period when he flourished (at the end of the 18th century), they contained such unequivocal marks of an identity with our holy religion, that he took for granted that Freemasonry was a Christian institution; and I believe ninety-nine out of every hundred Masons, then living, were of the same opinion."

Even to this day many Freemasons believe that Freemasonry and Christianity are identical. That is the reason why so many, who want to be true Christians, hold to Freemasonry. If they only knew that the religion of Freemasonry is unchristian, they would discard it at once.

this false religion is even taught by many so-called Christian church denominations. The Roman Catholic and other sectarian churches teach salvation by the works of the Law. The modern theologians and liberal preachers all teach and preach salvation by the works of the Law, that is, they all teach that a man can save himself by his own works. They all hold to the religion which Saul of Tarsus at one time had, but which he discarded when he became a true Christian, a true believer in Jesus Christ, the one and only Savior of sinful mankind. If there should be any among us this eve, who believe that they can save themselves by their own efforts, by their own good works,—I say, if there should be any such among us this eve,—then I must tell them, what Jesus told His hearers when He preached His Sermon on the Mount: “Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.” No sinner was ever saved by his own works. All religions which teach salvation by works are utterly false, and they cannot save. And all people that have such a religion *must* exchange it for the only true and saving religion or they will be eternally lost in hell. Which is the only true and saving religion in this world? It is the *Christian* religion. Therefore Saul of Tarsus exchanged his false religion for the religion of Jesus Christ,—the Christian religion. Of this I shall now speak to you in the second place.

2.

When Saul of Tarsus became sure of the fact that the religion of the Pharisees and scribes was altogether false and pernicious, he exchanged it for the Christian religion, and he became the greatest apostle of Jesus Christ,—the great Apostle St. Paul. When he had changed his religion he went out into all parts of the then known world and preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all who would listen to him. He no longer put his trust in his own works, but in the work of Jesus Christ; he confided no longer in his own righteousness, but he put his confidence in Jesus, in His blood and righteousness; he rested his hope for eternal salvation upon the grace of God in Christ Jesus, for he was now fully persuaded that all his own works and righteousness could not avail before the holy and just God, because they were imperfect.

When he had changed his religion he did not only preach Christ and Him crucified, but he also became the most blessed

and happiest man in all the world, for he knew that he now had a reconciled Father in heaven for Christ's sake; he no longer was terrified on account of his sins, because he knew that God had forgiven him all his sins for Christ's sake, that he now was God's child and an heir of eternal life. Though he encountered the hatred and persecutions of the enemies of Jesus and His Gospel, he, nevertheless, kept on working for the Lord, and admonished his fellow-Christians to do the same and cleave to Jesus and His saving Gospel. Yes, he warned them against all false religions and religionists. He writes to his beloved Philippians in our text: *"For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh."* He wishes to tell them, that while he was a Pharisee, he had put his confidence in himself, in his own works and righteousness, just as they also had done before they had become converted to Jesus Christ through the Gospel which he had preached to them, but that he as well as they did not and could not worship God in the spirit, because they had not put their confidence in Him, but in themselves. But now, since they had changed their religion, since they had turned their backs upon the false religion to which they formerly had adhered and had embraced the Christian, the only true and saving religion, they as well as he himself were true children of God, worshiping Him in the true spirit, and rejoicing in Jesus Christ. Yea, he tells them that everything which he formerly considered good and worthy, he now considers as worthless, for he writes: *"But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the Law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God (imputed to me) by faith."*

Mark, beloved fellow-Christians, how St. Paul rejoices that he, by God's grace, had changed his religion, or rather had exchanged his worthless religion for the only saving religion, that he was no longer a self-righteous Pharisee, but a true Christian, trusting in Jesus Christ and His merits. He had lost nothing, but gained everything, viz., Jesus, the Savior, forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation. And thus it was with all who exchanged a worthless religion for the Christian religion.

*Paul
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text
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Think of Luther. You know that, while he was a Roman Catholic, he found no rest for his troubled soul. He tried to gain salvation by his works, as he had been taught in the Roman Catholic Church, but the more he labored, the more he felt that he was a lost sinner, because he knew that he *had not* and *could not* keep God's Law perfectly. But after he had found the Bible with its saving Gospel, he became convinced that the Roman Catholic religion is false and pernicious, and he changed his religion, or in other words, he exchanged his false religion for the true Christian religion, the religion of works for the religion of grace through faith in Christ Jesus. And he began to preach the Gospel which he had found to others, and continued his Gospel-work up to his blessed end. Luther abounded in good works, but not in order to save himself by them, but to show his love and gratitude to his good and gracious Lord and Savior, or in other words, to prove his faith in the Redeemer of sinners.

So it is to this very day. Whenever a man changes his false religion for the only true and saving religion of Jesus Christ, when he no longer puts his confidence in his own righteousness and works, but in Jesus Christ and His blood and righteousness, he becomes a blessed and happy man; he rejoices in God's saving grace, and he cheerfully and willingly serves Him by a truly Christian life.

Yes, indeed, the Bible is the only book which teaches how a poor sinner can be eternally saved, because it teaches the only saving religion.* Let us then, my beloved fellow-Christians, cling

* Prof. Max Mueller, the great Orientalist, Professor at Oxford, said:

"I dare say, that I have devoted as much time and study to the so-called sacred writings of the Orient in the last forty years, than any other living man. And I must tell you, that the sacred writings of the Orient, with one accord, teach that man must be eternally saved by his own efforts and attainments. They all teach, that eternal life must be purchased by human works. The Bible, and the Bible only, from start to finish, is a protest against this doctrine. Good works are, indeed, taught by it as being necessary, but not necessary unto eternal salvation. They are only the fruit, never the cause of faith in the Savior, and they are not the cause of salvation. The cause of salvation is only the grace of God and the work of Christ's redemption.

"Let us not deny that the sacred writings of the Orient contain some good things; but let us teach the Hindus, Buddhists, and Mohammedans, that there is only *one* sacred Book, which

to the one and only true religion,—the Christian religion, and do all we can do that those people that have not the Christian religion may exchange their false religion for the only true and saving one, so that they may be eternally saved. This God grant for Christ's sake! Amen.

can give unto them and us true comfort in that last and solemn hour when we must tread the dark path into eternity,—the Bible.”

Seventh Sunday after Trinity.

Psalm 136, 25.

He giveth food to all flesh; for His mercy endureth forever.

It is an undeniable fact that most people do not love nor serve the true God, who has revealed Himself in Holy Writ as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Most people have false gods or idols, whom they love and serve. Heathen people, so we are told by Christian missionaries and historians, serve as many as thirty-three millions of different idols. Infidels and unbelievers in so-called Christian lands, however, have not as many idols as the heathen people have, but, nevertheless, they have false gods or idols. About a century ago, when Rationalism held sway in outer Christendom, *human reason* was adored by many as God. In our own materialistic age, however, infidels and unbelievers say that *nature* is God.

When, for example, the farmers were fortunate enough to gather in an abundant harvest, infidels and unbelievers will say that nature deserves gratitude for its providence. They ascribe all temporal blessings to the benevolent providence of nature.

And, my dear friends, what do they understand by *nature*? Most assuredly, nothing else than the *laws of nature*.

But what are the laws of nature? A law is always and always must be, the expression of a will. You can find laws only where there is a law-giver. Law is always the expression of the will of an intelligent being. Whose will, then, is expressed by the laws of nature? The only correct answer to this question is this: God's will. Without God there could be no laws of nature. It pleases God to sustain all creatures through the laws of nature, as we learn from the Holy Scriptures and from our own observations. But God is not bound by the laws of nature, as we see from many instances recorded in Holy Writ. He can suspend the laws of nature at will and accomplish anything He wishes to accomplish without them. What, therefore, all Christian people ascribe to God, infidels and unbelievers ascribe to the laws of nature, or, as they commonly express themselves, to nature. And for this very reason they will tell us that we are indebted to nature for all blessings which we enjoy. But that is rank nonsense. Thus only those people can speak who are not accustomed to right thinking. Not nature, but God, sustains all living

creatures. It is God, and He alone, who gives food to all flesh: to man, beast, and fowl. This indisputable fact shall now engage our attention, my beloved friends. By the assistance of the Holy Spirit, and in accordance with our text, I shall now endeavor to impress upon your mind and soul the absolute fact,—

That God, not Nature, Sustains All Creatures.

I shall show,

1. *How undeniably true this statement is, and*
2. *Unto what this absolute truth should move us.*

1.

In his wonderful explanation of the First Article Dr. Luther so beautifully confesses: "I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still preserves them," and every true Christian joins Luther in this confession, for every true Christian knows, as Luther knew, that God alone is the giver and sustainer of life. "By Him all things consist," Col. 1, 17. "In Him we live, and move, and have our being." Acts 17, 28. Even the laws of nature are dependent upon His divine will. As nothing can create itself, so nothing can sustain itself. God, who has created all things by the power of His will and word, sustains them. Man, beast, and fowl, yea, every living being is dependent upon God for its preservation. And the divine mercy of the Lord prompts Him to give food to all flesh, as the Psalmist says in our text: "*He giveth food to all flesh.*"

God has made the laws of nature with a specific purpose. He purposed to uphold all things through them. But God Himself is not by any means bound by them. He can suspend the laws of nature whenever it pleases Him to do so, and yet He can accomplish His will. That this is true we see from many passages of the Bible. Among other passages the Gospel-lesson for this Sunday is proof for the correctness of this statement. St. Mark tells us: "In those days the multitude being very great, and having nothing to eat, Jesus called His disciples unto Him, and saith unto them, I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now been with Me three days, and have nothing to eat; and if I send them away fasting to their own houses, they will faint by the way; for divers of them came from far. And His disciples answered Him, From whence can a man satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness? And He asked them,

How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven. And He commanded the people to sit down on the ground; and He took the seven loaves, and gave thanks, and brake, and gave to His disciples to set before them; and they did set them before the people. And they had a few small fishes; and He blessed, and commanded to set them also before them. So they did eat, and were filled; and they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets. And they that had eaten were about four thousand; and He sent them away." And St. John tells us that Jesus fed five thousand men with five loaves of bread and two fishes in a wilderness, and that after they all had been satisfied, there remained twelve baskets full of fragments (John 6, 1—15).

These two incidents do not only prove that Jesus of Nazareth, who fed those thousands with a few loaves of bread and a few fishes, is the very Son of God, but also that He is not at all bound by the laws of nature. Had Jesus been bound by the laws of nature then, my beloved friends, He would not have been able to do as He did, for a mere man cannot ignore the laws of nature, if he wishes to accomplish anything. Only God can do whatsoever He wills, *with* or *without* the laws of nature. He can suspend the laws of nature and accomplish whatsoever He wishes to accomplish. All creatures are subject to the laws of nature. If, for example, a farmer should leave his grain in his granary, he could not expect to harvest again. No; if a farmer would harvest from year to year, he must sow and plant from year to year, that is, he must comply with the laws of nature. If any man would harvest where he has not sown or planted, he would be regarded as a rank idiot, a man beside himself, and justly so. All mere men must subject themselves to the laws of nature, otherwise they cannot accomplish anything. But it is not so with God. He can do as *He pleases*, for *He is not bound by the laws of nature*. That this is true, is not only evident from the feeding of the four thousand with seven loaves of bread and a few small fishes, and the feeding of the five thousand with five loaves of bread and two small fishes, but also from other incidents, which are recorded in the Holy Scriptures. God sustained the Prophet Elijah in a wonderful way, in a manner that was contrary to the laws of nature, for the handful of meal in the barrel and the little oil in the cruse of the widow at Zaraphat failed not for about two years. (1 Kings 17, 12—14). And during a period of forty years the Lord sustained millions of Israelites in a wilder-

ness with bread from heaven and water from a rock, and their clothing and footwear waxed not old during those two-score years. These incidents prove that God is not bound by the laws of nature. He can do as He pleases, for with Him nothing is impossible (Luke 1, 37). When the Psalmist says in our text that the Lord gives food to all flesh, that God sustains all creatures, he speaks an absolute truth. And when infidels and scoffers tell us that nature sustains all things they speak absolute foolishness; and when they ascribe the blessings which we enjoy to nature, and not to God, they commit a grievous sin.

If God so willed it, He would be able to give food to all flesh without the laws of nature, but such is not His will. He could sustain us without our labor or work, but it is His will that we and all men should work and labor, for He Himself says: "If any man would not work, neither should he eat." 2 Thess. 3, 10. Even the rich should work as long as they can. You frequently hear people say that they are not compelled to work because they have plenty of money. But they err. It is God's will that all should work as long as they can. He does not want loafers,—human drones. But all true Christians know that all their work can avail them nothing without God's blessing. They know that God sustains them; that He gives food to all flesh, as the Psalmist says in our text.

Unto what should this truth move us, my beloved fellow-Christians? This question I shall now answer in the second place.

2.

The absolute truth that God, not nature, gives food to all flesh should move us to confess it frankly and openly. This is our first duty.

It is, indeed, true that God sustains also brutes; for the Bible says that He gives to the beast his food; and to the young ravens which cry. God gives food also to the wicked people. He gives food to *all flesh*. "He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matt. 5, 45). It should be rank folly to say that all those men in the wilderness who were fed by Jesus, or that those millions of Israelites on their way from Egypt to Canaan, were pious and righteous. No; the Bible itself tells us of many of those Israelites that they were wicked, and that God punished them on account of their wickedness; but, nevertheless, God gave to them

food and raiment; He sustained them as well as the just and righteous. God gives food to the infidels and unbelievers, the worshipers of nature or other idols, who do not realize at all that it is He who sustains them. Luther so well says in his explanation of the Fourth Petition: "God gives daily bread indeed without our prayer, also to all the wicked; but we pray in this petition that He would lead us to know it, and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving." If we realize that it is God, not nature, who gives food to all flesh, then we will also frankly and openly confess this truth.

Furthermore, if we realize that God gives food to all flesh, we will also receive whatsoever He gives with thanksgiving. Infidels and unbelievers, who do not realize that God gives them all things which they need for the support of their body, do not thank Him for His manifold blessings. As soon as a man realizes that God, not nature, sustains him, he will give thanks unto the Lord, he will ascribe all blessings to the loving kindness of God, and feeling his own unworthiness, he will confess with Jacob of old: "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and all the truth, which Thou hast showed unto Thy servant" (Gen. 32, 10)! He will praise the Lord, saying with grateful King David: "Bless the Lord, O my soul and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits" (Ps. 103, 1. 2)! Yes, he will ever and anon ask with the Psalmist of old: "What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me?" Ps. 116, 12.

Furthermore, my beloved friends, the absolute truth that God, not nature, sustains all creatures should move us unto fervent prayers or invocations.

It is, indeed, true that even many so-called Christian people contend that it is useless to invoke the help of God when in need. They say that all men should thank God for His benefits, and sing doxologies or songs of praise unto Him, but that it is altogether useless to ask Him for help in times of great need; for, so they say, God will not suspend the laws of nature in order to help those who are in distress. Such a saying may sound very reasonable and it may be regarded as being very scientific, but it is neither reasonable nor scientific. It is not always necessary for God to suspend the laws of nature in order to help those in need of His help. Let me illustrate this fact by a few examples. When, a few years ago, great forest fires threatened to destroy the

whole northern half of the State of Minnesota, God answered the prayers of His children by sending abundant rains, and thus the all-consuming fires were extinguished. Or, again, there is a godly mother whose only child is crossing the continent on a fast train. The mother invokes God's gracious protection upon her child. The train is running at high speed, and it is night. The track-walker has walked his territory and has found everything intact. Since he has returned home a bridge has taken fire. The train is yet miles away. It must be stopt or there will be great loss of life when it rushes into the burning bridge. The track-walker cannot go to sleep. Why not? He himself is unable to explain the situation in which he finds himself. He finds no rest and quiet of mind until he goes over his territory once more. And, behold, he discovers the burning bridge to his utter amazement. He watches for the approach of the train. He beholds the glaring light of the locomotive yet miles away. He trims his lantern and gives the stopping signal to the engineer of the approaching train. The engineer stops the train. No one is injured. See, my dear fellow-Christians, how God can help in times of great danger without suspending the laws of nature! He has many ways and means to answer the prayers of His children; and He does answer them if they will only invoke His help with a believing heart.

The absolute truth that God sustains all creatures, finally, should move us unto charitableness. Realizing that we owe everything to the kind providence of God, and that without His blessing we can have nothing good whatever, we will cheerfully reciprocate His kindness towards us by doing good unto those whom He has given into our benevolent care, that is, to the forsaken, the needy, the sick and distressed. Realizing that we Christians are God's representatives here upon earth, we will not wantonly abuse His gifts bestowed upon us, but we will cheerfully do good unto all men, especially unto those who are of the household of faith (Gal. 6, 10). When we serve our poor and needy fellows, we serve the Lord Himself, for He has said that, whatsoever we do unto our fellow-men and fellow-Christians, He will regard as a work of love done to Him. All we Christians do, we should do out of love toward our gracious and benevolent God and Savior. Gratitude towards our gracious and benevolent God must prompt us unto charitableness. If it be not gratitude toward Him then, beloved friends, it is selfishness which induces us to

help others, if we at all do help them, and selfishness is an abomination in the sight of Him whose mercy endureth forever. The spirit of true gratitude is found only in us when we realize that all we are and all we have, we are and have by the grace and mercy of God. Let me illustrate this by an occurrence during the time of slavery in our beloved country!

During the days of slavery an old slave-woman was to be sold at auction. While she was being auctioneered, a man came forward and bought her. When she was turned over to him, he said to her: "You are free to go wherever you choose; I have bought you free; I do not want you to be a slave-woman any longer." What happened? Listen. The former slave fell down upon her knees and begged the good man who had bought her free, to permit her to go with him, so that she might serve him during the remaining days of her life. She said unto him, that it should be her greatest happiness to be permitted to serve a lord, such as he had shown himself to be. She felt that she never would be able to make good what he had done for her, even though she should live for many years to come. She realized her unworthiness and his loving kindness in the highest degree, and she wanted to serve him unto her end. That was gratitude! Thus we, beloved fellow-Christians, should feel toward our gracious and benevolent God. That we may always bear in our mind and heart His goodness and mercy bestowed upon us, and gratefully serve Him by helping our needy fellows, God grant for the sake of Jesus Christ! Amen.

Eighth Sunday after Trinity.

Colossians 2, 8.

Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.

Our text is taken from St. Paul's Epistle to the Colossians. Colossae was a city in the province of Phrygia, and it was situated about 15 miles southeast of Laodicea.

The church at Colossae was not founded by St. Paul, but by one of his disciples, most probably, by Epaphras.

St. Paul preached Jesus Christ, crucified and resurrected (1 Cor. 2, 2). And that is what His disciples also did. The people at Colossae had heard and had accepted the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ, and they proved their faith in the Redeemer by a truly Christian life. But while the Colossian church was rejoicing in Christ and His saving Gospel, some false teachers, who styled themselves philosophers, began to teach their false and pernicious doctrines to the dear Christians in Colossae. The congregation became annoyed by them in such a measure that it saw fit to send Epaphras to the Apostle Paul at Rome, in order that he might make report to the great apostle. Epaphras told St. Paul of the faith of the Colossians and of their great love and cheerful service to the Savior, but also of the false teachers and deceivers who had come to Colossae. The apostle was very much pleased to hear of the established faith and the truly Christian conduct of the Colossians, but his heart was filled with great sorrow when he heard how they were annoyed by the spoilers of the Christian religion. His loving heart went out to the Christians at Colossae, and when Epaphras returned, St. Paul gave him a letter, which he should give to the Colossian church. In this letter the apostle commends the Colossian Christians for their faith in Jesus, and he expresses his joy over their love and service to the Lord. But that was not all. He also admonishes them to hold fast to Jesus and His Word in the future as they had done in the past, and he solemnly warns them against the false teachers who had come to them with their philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. He entreats them to beware of the deceivers lest they become a prey to their false and soul-destroying doctrines. He did what Jesus had done when He

warned His hearers against false prophets, saying: "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves."

False teachers, deceivers, spoilers of the Christian religion at all times and in all ages have annoyed and disturbed the children of God, and they do it to this very day. The world, yea, outer Christendom, is full of false prophets, and they are doing their very best to lead people away from Jesus Christ and His saving Gospel. And for this reason it is the duty of all truly Christian preachers to do what Jesus and His apostles did, that is, they must warn the people against the spoilers of the Christian religion. This is also my duty. And no Christian, who really knows the Bible, will take offence at the warnings against the false teachers and false churches, because he knows that a true shepherd must not only feed his flock, but that he must also protect it against the wolves. In accordance with our text, and by the assistance of the Holy Spirit, let me now direct your attention to:

St. Paul's Solemn Warning Against the Spoilers of the Christian Religion.

1. *I shall mention some of the most notorious spoilers of the Christian religion in our age and our country, and*
2. *I shall show you why it is so necessary that all people beware of them.*

1.

Many people at Colossae had accepted the Gospel of Jesus Christ and thus they had become true Christians. For a while they were not annoyed by spoilers of the Christian religion. Though persecutions, even bloody persecutions, came upon them, as they came upon other churches in Asia Minor, they stood firm as the sturdy oak, whose roots have penetrated far into the solid ground; they were not swayed from Jesus and His Church. But there was a change. False teachers, vain deceivers, came to them, claiming to have had "new revelations," and to have found the real "key to the Holy Scriptures." These spoilers of the Christian religion called themselves philosophers or scientists. In our text St. Paul solemnly warned the Colossian Christians against these would-be-scientists, who were annoying them with their self-made religion, for he wrote unto them these solemn words: "*Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after*

the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ."

St. John, writing about 25 years after St. Paul, says unto his fellow-Christians: "Beloved, believe not every spirit (teacher), but try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world." 1 John 4, 1.

The solemn warnings of the holy apostles are not out of place in the present time. If the holy apostles were living to-day, they would say that the world, yea, even outer Christendom, is full of spoilers of the Christian religion,—full of false prophets. And these spoilers of the Christian religion are spreading their soul-destroying doctrines among the people in every possible way and by any possible means.

It will not be possible for me to call your attention to all the different spoilers of the Christian religion in one sermon. I shall therefore only mention the most notorious and obnoxious among them: those who are antichristian to the core and yet claim to be the very elite of the Christians.

In the first place I mention the *Russellites*, who call themselves *Bible Students*. Their founder was a certain man by the name of Charles T. Russell, who died a few years ago. This man contrary to the Holy Scriptures, predicted the *second coming* of Jesus Christ in the year 1914. He said that Jesus would come to establish a great kingdom here upon earth, and that then this world would be a veritable heaven; but Russell was a false prophet, a deceiver, for just the opposite took place: the World War broke loose and turned this old world into a veritable hell. Russell found many people who were willing to be duped by him and to give him their money. Every real Bible student knows that the time of the second coming of Christ has not been revealed by God in His Word; that the Lord will come as a thief in the night; that He will come to destroy this world, and not to establish a great kingdom here (See: 2 Pet. 3, 10; Mark 13, 32; Matt. 25, 31—46). The Russellites, who call themselves Bible Students, and who pretend to know everything the Bible teaches, deny all the fundamental doctrines of the Bible. They deny and ridicule the Bible doctrines of the Holy Trinity, of the deity of Jesus Christ, of the damnation of the unbelievers and wicked, of the efficacy of the Holy Sacraments, of the atonement for the sins of mankind by the sufferings and death of Jesus. In a little leaflet, which was delivered by unseen hands during the past week to

most families of our city, all the fundamentals of the Christian religion are ridiculed as "unreasonable," as "fallacies," as "inventions of the orthodox clergy." I ask you, my beloved friends, How can the Russellites be Christians when they teach the very opposite of what the Lord Himself taught? Jesus Himself commissioned His disciples to go and make disciples of all nations by baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost. He said that everyone who is baptized and believes in Him shall be eternally saved, and that everyone who does not believe in Him shall be eternally damned. How can the Russellites be Christians when they deny Jesus to be the only-begotten Son of God, and when they teach that Jesus is the first-created son of God! If Jesus is the first-created son of God then He is a creature, and He cannot be essentially God. How can the Russellites be Christians when they reject the Sacraments which Jesus Himself has instituted! Every candid mind will at once admit that that is impossible; that the Russellites are not Christians at all, but spoilers of the Christian religion; that they are antichristian to the very core, though they try to make people believe that they are the very best of Christians. The fact is that the Russellites do not know at all what true Christianity really is. Considering themselves wise, they have become fools. They are false teachers, vain deceivers, spoilers of the Christian religion, because they deny all essentially Christian doctrines as they are taught by God Himself in the Bible.

In the second place I wish to call your attention to another class of spoilers of the Christian religion. These are the so-called *Christian Scientists* or *Eddyites*. The founder of this antichristian sect was a woman by the name of Mary Baker Glover Patterson Eddy. Her book, called "Science and Health, with a Key to the Holy Scriptures," a volume of some 600 pages, is a book containing very little sense, but very much nonsense. It is inconceivable to any fair mind how any human mind could have produced such nonsense, unless it be inspired by the father of lies, the devil himself. So-called Christian Science also denies all the fundamental doctrines of the Bible, for it denies the personality of God, the personality of the devil, the creation of the universe, the creation of man, the existence of sin, of death, of hell, the Holy Trinity, the deity of Jesus Christ, His Virgin-birth, His atonement for the sins of mankind through His sufferings and death. Yes, Christian Science is a diabolical lie, a

pernicious fraud through which many Christians have already been led away from Jesus and His Church. The so-called Christian Scientists or Eddyites are in deed and in truth spoilers of the Christian religion.

In the third place I wish to call your attention to another class of spoilers of the Christian religion. These are the *Modernists*. Many of them occupy the chairs in many schools, colleges, and universities which are being supported by Christian people. Yes, many Modernists even fill the pulpits of Christian churches. Most of them in their youth were believing Christians. They had pious parents and faithful pastors. But when they tried to harmonize the doctrines of the Bible with their own reason, they found out that this could not be done, and so they put their own thoughts above God's thoughts, and thus they fell away from the Lord. They followed the traditions of men, of so-called scientists, and the rudiments of the world, that is, they adapted themselves to the ways of the unbelieving world, and thus they began to deny one fundamental doctrine of the Bible after the other, and finally they threw away the Bible itself. They deny all the fundamental doctrines of the Christian religion as they are taught in the Bible. They do not believe in the Holy Trinity, in the deity of Jesus of Nazareth, in the Virgin-birth of Jesus, in the atonement for the sins of mankind by the suffering and death of the Savior. They deny that there is a hell and eternal damnation for all who reject Jesus Christ by unbelief. They teach the natural religion, that is, they teach salvation by works. They have put their own dreams and hypotheses in the place of God's revelations in His Word. They parade themselves as scientists, while they know nothing of true science at all. Their guesses they call science. True science only deals with real facts. True scientists at all times have been and are to this very day opponents of those who put forth human hypotheses in the stead of God's Word and true science, and want men to follow them into dreamland. Though Modernists or Evolutionists call themselves Christians and, perhaps, many of them believe that they are Christians, they are nothing less than spoilers of the Christian religion. Follow them and you will be eternally damned.

Yes, beloved friends, the Russellites, the so-called Christian Scientists, and the Modernists or Evolutionists are the chief among the spoilers of the Christian religion. They are the triumvirate of Satan against Jesus Christ and His Church. Yes,

they are antichristian to the very core, every bit as antichristian as the Roman papacy.

Why should, yes, why must, all Christians, all people, beware of these spoilers of the Christian religion? This question I shall now answer in the second place.

2.

St. Paul warns his fellow-Christians in Colossae against all false teachers and spiritual deceivers. Why did he do that? The answer to this question is easily given. He did it, because he loved them and wanted them to be eternally saved. St. Paul knew that the only Savior of sinful men is Jesus Christ; he knew that a sinner can be saved only by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Redeemer of the sinful world; he knew that no man can save himself by his own works or merits; he knew that all people who do not accept Jesus Christ as their one and only Savior from sin, death, and damnation are eternally lost in hell. That is the reason why he so solemnly warned his fellow-Christians and his fellow-men against all false teachers and deceivers, against the spoilers of the Christian religion.

Sinful people, and all people are full of sins, cannot be eternally saved in any other way today than they were saved in the time of Jesus Christ and His apostles. There is but *one* way to heaven, and this one way is the way of *faith in Christ Jesus*, who by the shedding of His holy and innocent blood has redeemed all sinners to God (Rev. 5, 9). It is ever true what the Scripture saith: There is salvation in none other, neither is any other name given among men, whereby they can be saved than the blessed name of Jesus (Acts 4, 12; Matt. 1, 21). He can save and He does save, — He alone. For this very reason St. Paul wrote to the Galatian Christians: "Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other Gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other Gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed." (1, 8. 9).

Preachers and Christian laymen, who do not warn their fellow-men and fellow-Christians against false teachers and spiritual deceivers, that is, against the spoilers of the Christian religion, cannot be disciples of Jesus Christ.

My friends, tell me, Why does the health-officer of our city

send the marshal to our homes with a card, which he tacks to our door whenever some contagious disease has broken out in our family? You all know why he does it. He wishes to warn those who are well to stay away, lest they also become sick. If no quarantining were done, contagious diseases could not be arrested, and many more people would become a prey to them. So it is also in regard to spiritual matters. If there would be no solemn warnings against the spoilers of the Christian religion, many more people would become the prey of Satan and his servants. You should not be backward in warning people against the spoilers of the Christian religion; no, you should warn every one whom you can warn, so that your fellows be not led away from Christ, but that they, when the false prophets come to them, flee to Jesus and cling to Him and His Gospel in life and in death, and be eternally saved.

Perhaps some of you will say, "Well, if I warn people against false prophets and false churches they will get angry at me, for they don't like to be warned against the spoilers of the Christian religion." My dear friend, you are mistaken; for they will only respect you so much the more. And even if they do not do that, you *must* warn them, because that is the will of your God and Savior. On the Day of Judgment, those whom you have warned and who turned themselves from the spoilers of the Christian religion will thank you and praise God. And those who will not listen to your warnings will then curse themselves and the spoilers of the Christian religion.

May God therefore give unto us His grace so that we may take courage to warn our follow-men and fellow-Christians against all spoilers of the Christian religion! Amen.

Ninth Sunday after Trinity.

John 21, 15.

So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me more than these? He saith unto Him, Yea, Lord; Thou knowest that I love Thee. He saith unto him, Feed My lambs.

In today's Gospel-lesson we have one of our dear Savior's many parables. In this parable Jesus tells us that a certain rich man had a very smart, but unjust steward. When he found out that his steward had cheated him out of much money, he told him that he no longer could be his steward.

What did the steward then do? Jesus tells us that he said within himself: "What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship; I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed. I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses." And he did what he had resolved to do, for he called every one of his lord's debtors unto him, and said to the first: "How much owest thou unto my lord?" The debtor answered: "An hundred measures of oil." The steward said to him: "Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty." Then the steward said to another debtor: "And how much owest thou?" He answered: "An hundred measures of wheat." The steward told him: "Take thy bill, and write fourscore." And thus he did with all the debtors of his lord. He remitted to every one of them a large portion of his debt. Yes, the steward was a smart, but very unjust man.

The world is full of such men as this steward was. There are many smart men, but they are also very crooked and unjust in their dealings with their fellow-men. Such men, of course, are not and cannot be true Christians. But not only that, they are not even good citizens. Men who cheat and defraud their fellow-citizens are not good citizens. They may be ever so well educated in the secular branches of knowledge and be ever so smart, yet they are bad citizens. Their smartness does not do them any real good. Having no conscience, they are only rushing into temporal and, finally, into eternal destruction, for the end of their way is damnation in hell.

In order that our children may become not only good citizens, but also good Christians, we must not only have them well educated in the secular branches, but also in spiritual matters;

they must not only receive a good secular, but also a good religious training. That this is true not only the greatest churchmen, but also the greatest statesmen at all times have acknowledged. Daniel Webster, undoubtedly the greatest American statesman, said: "Whatever makes men good Christians, makes them good citizens." And the greatest of all British statesmen, William E. Gladstone, said to his countrymen: "Try to make good conscientious Christians out of your children, and Great Britain will be well satisfied with them as citizens." What these great statesmen advised their countrymen to do, the Lutheran Church has been doing since the days of Martin Luther: she has established and maintained *Christian schools*. Why? This question I shall now answer in accordance with our text, and by the gracious assistance of the Holy Spirit.*

Why Does the Lutheran Church Establish and Maintain Christian Schools?

I answer,

1. *Because she has the command of Jesus to feed His lambs, and*
2. *Because under the prevailing conditions she can feed them best by nuturing them in Christian schools.*

1.

St. John says in our text: "*So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me more than these? He saith unto Him, Yea, Lord: Thou knowest that I love Thee. He saith unto him, Feed My lambs.*"

What St. John relates in these words occurred after the glorious resurrection of our dear Savior. Simon Peter, Thomas called Didymus, Nathanael, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples of Jesus were fishing in the Sea of Tiberias. They had labored all night and had caught nothing. In the morning Jesus stood on the shore, but they did not know that it was He. Then Jesus called unto them and said, "Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find." They did what He had told them to do. They caught 153 big fishes. When they came to the land they saw a fire of coals, and fish laid thereon, and bread. Jesus had prepared a meal for them.

* The author preaches a school-sermon annually a few weeks before the beginning of the new school-year.

Then they knew that it was the risen Savior. After they had dined, Jesus spoke to them, and among other things said to Simon Peter: "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me more than these?" Simon answered Him: "Yea, Lord; Thou knowest that I love Thee." Then said Jesus to him, "Feed My lambs." And after He had thus spoken to Simon Peter, He asked him again, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me?" Simon answered, "Yea, Lord; Thou knowest that I love Thee." Then said Jesus to him, "Feed My sheep." And again, the third time, Jesus asked Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me?" Simon Peter was grieved because Jesus said to him the third time, Lovest thou Me? And he said to Jesus: "Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee." Then said Jesus to him: "Feed My sheep."

Jesus commanded Simon Peter to feed His sheep and His lambs. But this command the Lord did not give to Peter only, but also to all those who really love Him. This command of the Savior is given to all true Christians, to the whole Christian Church on earth. This command concerns also us, my beloved fellow-Christians.

We must not overlook the fact that Jesus calls our little baptized children *His lambs*. Yes, they belong to Him. They are His by creation, by redemption, and by sanctification. He created them, He has given them body and soul, eyes and ears, and all their members, their reason and all their senses, and still preserves them. He has redeemed them, purchased and won them from all sin, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood, and with His innocent suffering and death, that they may be His own, and live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocense, and blessedness. He has sanctified them by means of holy Baptism. His lambs He wants to have fed, so that they may not perish.

What food, then, beloved friends, must the children have that they perish not? Of course, none other than the Word of God. You may teach children ever so much in the secular branches, you may fill their heads with all kinds of worldly wisdom, if, at the same time, you do not give them the Word of God as a daily food for their immortal souls, they will perish in eternity in spite of all their worldly wisdom. Nothing but the Word of God is able to satisfy the hunger and thirst of an immortal soul. Our children must learn the *Law* of God that they may

know God's will and also their sin and guilt. They must also learn the *Gospel* and the Savior, who alone is able to heal their wounded souls. They must learn to know that this Savior is *their* Savior, who has bought them with His holy and precious blood; who made them His own already in their infancy by holy Baptism, whom they must serve with grateful hearts for His great service of love. If you withhold from your children the Word of God you withhold from them the food of their immortal souls. If you withhold from them the Word of God you permit them to perish. Christianity is not a religion of the *head*, but it is a religion of the *heart*, and that it may be such to our children, it is absolutely necessary that they be trained in the Word of God.

My beloved fellow-Christians, permit me to call to your attention a few sayings of a man whom all of us honor and love, and at whose feet we love to sit anxious to learn. Hear what he has to say in regard to the daily instruction of children in the Word of God. I mean *Martin Luther*. He said: "Where the Holy Scriptures do not reign, verily, I would advise no one to put his child. Everything which is not governed by God's Word must perish." And again he said: "The schools are wide gates of hell, if they will not diligently practise and use the Holy Scriptures and instill them into the minds of the young." That these words of the great Reformer of the Church are nothing but the truth every one who knows anything about conditions as they exist today will readily admit.

But if some one should say in opposition to this, Should then our children learn nothing but the Word of God? Must they not be taught also the secular branches of knowledge, as they must also be prepared for a useful life in this world? Luther again furnishes the correct answer, when he says: "Some teachers teach the children nothing from the Holy Scriptures, some teach nothing but the Holy Scriptures, neither of which is to be tolerated." Indeed, the child has a twofold calling. It has an earthly and a heavenly calling. Therefore it needs a secular and a religious training. In order to be able to serve God in the service of its neighbor a child must acquire a thorough secular knowledge,—not wild speculations or theories which nowadays are called knowledge,—otherwise a person cannot be of service to others; and for its heavenly calling the child needs God's

Word, since by the Word of God only it can become heavenly-minded and eternally saved.

It is, indeed, very true, my beloved friends, that Christian congregations are at a very considerable expense in maintaining Christian schools for their children, but, nevertheless, they know that they owe it to their children to have them instructed not only for this present life, but also for the life which is to come. They feel about it like the great American Gospel-preacher Moody, who relates, that a dying boy said to his father: "Father, don't weep for me; when I get to heaven I will go straight to Jesus and tell Him that ever since I can remember you have tried to lead me to Him." "I would rather," said Moody, "that my children say that of me when I am gone; or if they die before me, I would rather they should take that message to the Master than have a monument over me reaching to the skies." Yes, all truly great Christian men and women at all times have felt that the Savior's command, "*Feed My lambs*," concerned not only St. Peter, but that it concerns the whole discipleship of Jesus on earth, that is, His whole Church. All those, who love Him as Peter did, should feed His lambs.

But, my beloved fellow-Christians, under the prevailing conditions, the Church can comply with this command of the Savior only when she establishes and maintains *Christian* schools. This fact has also been voiced lately by preachers and laymen *outside of the Lutheran Church*. Of this I shall now speak to you in the second place.

2.

We Lutheran Christians are convinced that we can best feed the lambs of Jesus by nurturing them in *Christian* schools. This firm conviction prompts us to establish and maintain Christian schools for our children.*

Our Christian schools always have had many enemies in our beloved country. Of course, very many of those who oppose our Christian schools do not know what they really are, and, again, others oppose them for no other reason than that they are *Christian* schools. During the late World War some enemies of

* According to the latest statistics in my possession the Lutheran Church in the United States maintained 6,200 schools with 265,000 pupils taught by 6,300 male teachers (including more than 2,000 pastors) and about 400 female teachers.

our Christian schools even made the absurd claim that we Lutherans were teaching our children the so-called *German Kultur*. The fact is that there are no people in the world who oppose the "German Kultur" more than the Lutherans. Other enemies of our Christian schools made the absurd claim that our Christian schools were detrimental to our American democracy. The fact is that the American Lutheran Church is the most democratic institution in the whole world. Our American democracy would have been impossible without the influence of the Protestant Reformation. Martin Luther may truly be called the father of American liberty and democracy. Luther's courageous stand at the Diet at Worms in 1521 gave birth to religious and civil liberties. The fact is that you cannot find more intelligent and more loyal supporters of our American liberties than the true Lutherans. All true Lutherans stand for the Constitution of our beloved country, and they consider it the supreme law of our country. I can truthfully say that during my whole lifetime I have never read in any truly Lutheran paper or periodical one single sentence which advocated the overthrow of our American democracy or the abrogation of our American Constitution. It cannot be otherwise, for all true Lutherans are true Christians, and all true Christians are good citizens.

In our country the public schools are, and under the prevailing conditions, must be *non-Christian*. The public schools are state schools. The non-Christian people would not willingly send their children to a school in which the Christian religion is taught, and if the government would compel them to do so, it would cease to grant religious liberty to them, which the Constitution guarantees to every citizen. But the children of the non-Christians must be schooled otherwise they cannot perform their duties towards the government. For this reason our government establishes and maintains public schools. Lutherans, therefore, do not at all deny that public schools are a necessity, and they willingly pay their taxes for the maintenance of the same.

We Lutherans are not opposed to the public schools; but we do believe that we must bring up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; that we must feed the lambs of Jesus with the Word of God. This we can do best, under the prevailing conditions, by nurturing them in Christian schools. To the Church, not to the civil government, the Lord Jesus gave the command to feed His lambs. Consequently Christians must

establish and maintain *Christian schools*, in which the lambs of Jesus are well fed.

Church and state are and must be *separate*. Let each tend to its own business. The state tends to and fulfils its duty by establishing and maintaining public schools. Let the Church tend to and fulfil its duty by establishing and maintaining Christian schools. God will not ask the civil government on the Day of Judgment, "Did you feed My lambs?" but He will ask the Church and all Christian parents, "Did you feed My lambs?" And woe to that congregation and those parents who then must answer, "Lord, we did not!"

We Lutheran Christians establish and maintain Christian schools because we know that our children must not only be trained in the secular branches of learning, but that by all means they must receive a thorough Christian training. Therefore we cannot send our children to the public schools only, for without a thorough instruction in God's Word a truly Christian training is impossible. We do not want our children to be brought up for this world only, but also for heaven, that they may live in this world as heirs of heaven. And since the state or public schools do not, and cannot, furnish us with what we *must* have for our children according to Christ's command, namely, a thorough Christian training, what other course can we pursue, so I ask, than that we establish and maintain Christian schools, though even with great sacrifices, and then in these schools give our children that training which they need for time and eternity?

And we cannot make better use of our money than to employ it for the Christian training of our children. We thereby benefit the children in laying the foundation for their whole temporal and eternal welfare. We thereby, furthermore, benefit the Church which is built by rearing the children in the fear and love of God, And we, finally, benefit the state whose best citizens are those who are governed by the Spirit of God, as Daniel Webster has so truthfully said, "Whatever makes men good Christians, makes them good citizens." *

* What others say about the Christian schools.

Dr. Stanley Hall, Professor in Clark University, said to hundreds of teachers at the San Francisco Convention: "I am really sorry for you people. You are now going home to your schools with roseate hopes. You believe that your work will be a blessing, and that the welfare of the country depends upon your work.

May God bless and protect our Christian schools! May He bless the labors of the teachers and the pupils! May He also give cheerful and willing hearts and hands to all members of our beloved Church that they may liberally support our beloved Christian schools! May He do this for the sake of Him who has commanded His Church to feed His lambs! Amen.

But I repeat, I am sorry for you. You cannot educate in the public schools because the Word of God is lacking! Your work simply consists in training the reason of the children intrusted to you. The only people in our country who know how to educate children are the Lutherans...in the parochial schools."

Theodore Roosevelt: "A man whose intellect has been educated, while at the same time his moral education has been neglected, is only the more dangerous to the community because of the exceptional additional power which he has acquired."

George Washington: "Of all the dispositions which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are an indispensable support. And let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason, and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle."

The Presbyterian: "If the secular education of our young were carried on in the same haphazard way as their education in the things of Christ and His kingdom, what a nation of ignoramuses we would soon have!" And again: "The state schools are all right for technical purposes, but they cannot and do not develop character."

G. W. Pepper: "In the Christian theory there are really no such things as secular and religious education. This life is not supposed to be a life of divided allegiance, part of his time being given to God and part to mammon."

Charles W. Elliot, ex-president of Harvard: "No one can teach morals successfully without religion. Take religion out of education, and you have no foundation upon which to build a moral character."

Place of Religion in Education, p. 103: "What must be the effect on the child's mind when we leave religion out of his school-life? The most obvious will be to separate it from his daily thought and living, as if it were a thing that could be put on and off with his Sunday collar. How can it fail that to the child, whose whole thoughts and experiences center about school, this exclusion from the all-important sphere of his life will give it a false impression of significance?"

Duke of Wellington: "Educate men without religion and you make them but clever devils."

Tenth Sunday after Trinity.

Matt. 23, 37—38.

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.

St. James, one of the twelve apostles of our dear Savior, says: "There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy." This one Lawgiver is the almighty God, with whom nothing is impossible, who has the absolute power to *fulfil all His promises* and to *execute all His threats*.

That St. James spoke the whole truth, is evident from the history of mankind from the beginning to this very day. When, for example, the Prophet Jonah came to the great city of Nineveh, predicting God's dire judgments, unless its people would truly repent, and promising God's grace, if they would turn from their wickedness unto the true God, they repented and the Lord spared them (Jonah 3). When, furthermore, Sennacherib, the Assyrian king, came to Jerusalem during the reign of the God-fearing King Hezekiah, the Lord called upon the Jerusalemites to repent, and He promised them His divine grace, if they would turn to Him. They did repent, and the Lord sent an angel into the Assyrian hordes, who slew 185,000 Assyrians during one night. King Sennacherib had to flee with those left over in order to save himself and his remaining men from utter destruction. The almighty God had fulfilled His promise, and Jerusalem was saved. (See: Is. 37). Indeed, every promise ever made by the almighty and gracious God has been fulfilled, and always will be fulfilled, for His promise is sure; He cannot lie (Ps. 33, 4).

But, beloved friends, God at all times also executed His dire threats, and He always will do so until the end of time; for He is not mocked (Gal. 6, 7). That this is true, we see from many instances recorded in the Holy Scriptures and the history of the divers nations in this world.

God is a gracious God, and He does not like to strike the people in His wrath, but He wants all men to repent and live; but when all His entreaties are despised, He will strike the fatal blow at last. When, for example, the first world despised God's gracious call unto repentance by the preachments of His great

Prophet Noah. He finally, after those 120 years of grace had come to a close, struck the fatal blow at humankind, and of all the inhabitants then living in this world only eight souls, Noah and his family, were saved from the waters of the Flood. Again, when the people of Sodom, Gomorrah, and other wicked cities, refused to heed God's call to repentance by the mouth of pious Lot, God finally destroyed them all by fire, which fell from heaven, and consumed them, only Lot and his two daughters escaping. And, finally, when the Jews would not obey the Lord, He destroyed their city and temple, and led them into the Babylonian captivity through King Nebuchadnezzar. And though He led them back after seventy years, and permitted them to rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple, He again threatened them with *total* destruction, if they should again despise His grace, and refuse to serve Him with willing hearts and ready hands (Dan. 9, 27). To this threat our dear Savior refers in our text. He laments over the Jerusalemites; yea, He even sheds tears over the unbelieving and perverse inhabitants of the Holy City, as St. Luke tells us in today's Gospel-lesson, because He knew two things: He knew that the Jews would not truly repent, and that they were doomed. His lamentation is, indeed, a most touching cry for merciful solicitude, wrung from His heart full of sincerest love and compassion. Let us now direct our attention to this lamentation of Jesus over Jerusalem. By the assistance of the Holy Spirit, and in accordance with our text, I shall now call your attention to:—

The Lamentation of Jesus over Jerusalem.

He laments over Jerusalem,

1. *Because Jerusalem knew not the time of its gracious visitation.*
2. *Because Jerusalem hastened the time of its awful destruction.*

1.

'Twas an awful thing — the Fall of man! By the Fall man and his posterity were alienated from God. The Fall made children of wrath and condemnation out of God's children. But — O the wonderful graciousness of God! God promised to fallen man a Savior. By the mouth of His prophets He promised to send His only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, who should save His

people from their sins. God fulfilled His promises. He could not do otherwise, for He cannot lie. In the fulness of time He sent His Son, being born of a woman. The Eternal Word (Son of God) was made flesh and dwelt among men. At the time of His incarnation an angel appeared to the lowly shepherds, who were watching their flocks in the vicinity of Bethlehem, and he gladdened their hearts, saying: "Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord." (Luke 2, 10. 11). And when the angel had proclaimed his tidings of great joy, the whole host of good angels surrounded the shepherds, and chanted the wonderful Christmas-carol, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men," into their ears and hearts:

What sweeter music could they bring
Than a carol for to sing
The birth of this their heavenly King!

This heavenly King of angel and man, this incarnate Son of God, Jesus Christ, had come to save that which was lost—to save fallen, sinful, lost mankind by the shedding of His precious blood; for without the shedding of *His* blood there was no salvation for sinners. Only the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sins (1 John 1, 7).

And now, beloved friends, the time had come in which the all-sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the lost world was to be offered by Him on the altar of the cross,—He Himself being that sacrifice. "Behold," said He to His disciples, who accompanied Him on His last journey to the city, "we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man shall be accomplished. For He shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on; and they shall scourge Him, and put Him to death; and the third day He shall rise again." (Luke 18, 31—33.)

When He had come to the city, He went into the Temple, preaching the Gospel, and upbraiding the people, especially the self-righteous Pharisees and scribes. He held up to them their terrible sins which they had committed by rejecting the Word of God and by killing those prophets that preached it. He tells them that He would also send prophets and wise men unto them, but that they would harden their hearts against their preachments, and finally they would kill and crucify them. These

prophets and wise men were the apostles and first Christian preachers. Jesus knew of what He was speaking, for with His all-seeing eye He could see into the future. He saw that the Jewish people would not accept the saving Gospel; that they would neglect the day of their gracious visitation. His heart aches Him for this perverse nation, for He loved them all. He pleads with His hearers, and, lamenting, He cries out: *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!"*

Indeed, Jesus loved the Jerusalemites. He would save them all, but they would not be saved by Him. He had called them to Himself for the last three years by His wonderful Gospel sermons, but it was in vain. They would not permit Him to gather them under His wings of love and protection. They hated Him with all their heart. The more He preached unto them, so much the more they hardened their hearts against Him and His saving Gospel. And He knew that they would do the very same thing when, after His death and resurrection, His apostles and disciples would preach unto them. Yes, He laments over Jerusalem because its inhabitants knew not the time of their gracious visitation. He would save them, but they would not be saved by Him. St. Luke tells us that Jesus wept when He came to the doomed city; doomed on account of its unbelief and hardness of heart. With a few exceptions, the Jews would not believe in Him, would not be eternally saved, and, therefore, He laments and weeps over them. "The ground of His grief was, not that they had sinned and brought on themselves condemnation—in that there was nothing peculiar to Jerusalem;—what makes Him weep and lament is, that they will not accept redemption at His hands."

Not only the Jewish nation had its time of gracious divine visitation, but also many others. The inhabitants of every country, community, and city in which the Gospel of Jesus is preached experience a time of gracious visitation. But, alas! many, like the Jews of the Savior's day, do not know the time of their gracious visitation. They do not repent of their sins, do not embrace the Savior by true faith, and do not honor Him by leading a Christian life. Like the Jews they are self-righteous and self-satisfied. They will not be saved by the *only* Savior. Oh, how

sad! Jesus must lament and weep over them as He lamented and wept over Jerusalem, because they know not the day of their gracious visitation. They neglect their own salvation. Jesus time and again knocks at the door of their heart, He implores them to accept Him as their Savior, but they do not care for Him. He would save them, but they will not be saved. With a heavy heart and with tears in His eyes He must cry out in lamentation: *"How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!"* Yea, each individual person has a day of gracious visitation. This very hour in which you are listening to a Gospel sermon is *your* day of gracious visitation, my beloved friend.

Let me now ask you a question, a very important question, How are you spending your day of gracious visitation? Are you spending it like the inhabitants of Jerusalem in our Savior's time, and like so many others in our own time? Are you trifling with your soul's salvation? Are you neglecting the things which belong to your eternal peace? If you do, then, my friends, Jesus Christ, your Savior, must weep and lament over you, not only because you do not know the time of your gracious visitation, but also because you are hastening the time of your awful destruction. Of this fact I shall now speak to you in the second place.

2.

Jesus did not only cry out against Jerusalem: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" but He also cried out this terrible warning into their ears: *"Behold, your house is left unto you desolate."* How terrible! Jesus tells them that, unless they truly repent, they, and their city, and temple shall be utterly destroyed. How this was to be accomplished He told them with these words: "The days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation." (Luke 19, 43. 44). The day of God's gracious visitation, *if neglected*, begets the day of awful punishment and destruction. It

cannot be otherwise, because God is just and holy; He will not be mocked. This Jesus knew; and He foresaw the impending day of God's awful wrath over an unbelieving and ungrateful people.

What the Savior foresaw, He cried out in lamentation. And what He predicted, with tearful eyes and quavering voice, came to pass. His doleful prophecies concerning Jerusalem were all fulfilled in their minutest details. About thirty-seven years afterwards, the Romans, under the leadership of Titus, destroyed the city of Jerusalem. Josephus, a Jewish historian, tells us that, when the great walls of the city had been battered down, the Romans besieged the Temple. Titus very much desired to spare the sacred structure, but one of the soldiers cast a firebrand into one of the windows, and the entire edifice was soon in flames. A terrible massacre followed. The Romans gave no quarter, and many thousands of Jews perished by fire and sword, or by suicide in casting themselves down from the battlements. This scene of slaughter lasted several days, until Jerusalem was left entirely desolate, as Jesus predicted in our text. Ninety-seven thousand Jews were made prisoners, and eleven thousand of these were starved to death. During the five months of the siege there perished at Jerusalem, by famine, pestilence, fire, and sword, more than a million Jews.

When the victorious Romans had finished their destructive work of burning and slaughter, Titus ordered the whole city to be leveled with the ground, excepting a part of the western wall and three towers, which he left as memorials of his conquest. His orders were promptly executed. Mount Zion was plowed as a field and strewn over with salt, and the Temple was leveled with the ground. The Jews have ever since been dispersed among all nations. Thus ended the history of the Jewish people as a nation.

Had they truly repented of their sins, God would have forgiven them. But they repented not. Jesus knew that, with a few exceptions, they would not repent; He also knew that for this very reason the awful destruction of Jerusalem could not be averted. And therefore Jesus lamented over Jerusalem. He loved the Jews as He loves all people. He longed to save them; but they would not be saved. The poor Jews! To this very day they have hardened their hearts in hatred against the Savior of the world. Only now and then a few embrace Jesus by true faith and honor Him with a Christian life. Only a few are saved.

Some one might ask, What became of the Christians that lived in the city of Jerusalem? Eusebius, the historian, tells us that they received divine instructions to leave the city before the Romans laid siege to it. They went to a little city called Pella, which was located in the northern part of Perea, on the east side of the river Jordan. Yea, God is able to save His people!

If men neglect the things that belong to their eternal peace, then Jesus weeps and laments over them, because God's wrath and punishments are to come upon them. No one who does not truly repent will go unpunished. On the Day of Judgment, all things are righted. Then woe unto all those who have neglected the day of their gracious visitation!

If we, beloved friends, would escape the awful wrath and punishment of a holy and just God on the Day of Judgment, we must go to Jesus for help. If we will only go to Him in true faith and repentance, He will accept us; for He has said: "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (Matt. 11, 28). And again: "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out." (John 6, 37). Yes, if we only embrace Him by true faith, rely and trust in Him in life and death, then, beloved friends, He will shed tears of joy over us,— and in the final awful destruction He will take us to the "Pella of safety" that is, to the eternal city of God not made with hands, to the Jerusalem that cannot be destroyed, that shall be forevermore. O Lord Jesus!

While I draw this fleeting breath,
When my eyelids close in death,
When I soar to worlds unknown,
See Thee on Thy judgment throne,
Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee!

Amen.

Eleventh Sunday after Trinity.

Ezekiel 33, 10. 11.

Therefore, O thou son of man, speak unto the house of Israel: Thus ye speak, saying, If our transgressions and our sins be upon us, and we pine away in them, how should we then live? Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?

“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” Acts 16. 30. This all-important question was originally asked by a jailor at Philippi in Macedonia. St. Paul and Silas had been cast into the prison. They had done nothing amiss. On the contrary, they had done wonderful things for the inhabitants of Philippi, for they had brought them the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ, the crucified and resurrected Savior of the sinful world. But it was then, as it is now. The Gospel of salvation is foolishness unto the worldly-wise and self-righteous people. They do not want it, because they do not want the only Savior of sinners. The Gospel of Jesus Christ calls upon all sinners to embrace Jesus Christ as their Savior, and for His sake to renounce the world with all its lusts and wickedness. For this reason worldlings do not want to hear it, nor do they want to have anything to do with those, who proclaim it. The preachers of the straight Gospel of Jesus Christ are hated and despised by those who are wise in their own estimation and who love this world and the things that are in it.

St. Paul and Silas had been cast into the prison at Philippi, because they had preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ. While they were in prison, a great earthquake occurred, and the doors of the prison were opened, and the bonds of every prisoner were loosed. When the jailor saw what had taken place, he was about to commit suicide, because he knew that, if any of the prisoners should escape he would be beheaded. He was a heathen man; he knew not how he could be saved; he felt that he was under the wrath and displeasure of the Lord. Oh, the poor, miserable man! The state of mind in which he found himself, was most terrible; he gave himself up to despair. St. Paul called him with a loud voice, saying: “Do thyself no harm, for we are all here!” The jailor became persuaded that St. Paul, who had helped the sooth-saying girl from the power of the devil, could help him also, and he came and fell down before Paul and Silas, saying:

“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” And the great apostle said to him: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.” He tells him that God would be gracious unto him, if we would accept Jesus Christ as his Savior. What St. Paul told him, was indeed very true, for that is the only way in which sinners can secure God’s divine grace. Even during the time of the Old Testament God was gracious to all sinners who embraced the promised Messiah by true faith. That is the reason why God called upon all poor sinners to believe the promises concerning the Messiah, and be saved. He was gracious to sinners for the sake of the promised Savior. And He offered His grace to them, because He wanted all of them to be eternally saved. That this is true, we see from our text. In accordance with the same, and by the assistance of the Holy Spirit, let me now speak to you of—

The Grace of God Towards Sinners.

Let me show,

1. *Why the holy and just God can be gracious to sinners, and*
2. *That His grace is in store for all sinners.*

1.

God had sent His prophet, the great Prophet Ezekiel, to the Israelites that he might convince them of their sinfulness. The prophet preached God’s Law in all its severity, and the result was, that the Israelites realized that they were under God’s wrath and displeasure on account of their transgressions of the divine Law. They said unto Ezekiel: “*If our transgressions and our sins be upon us, and we pine away in them, how should we then live?*”

Like the Philippian jailor, the Israelites realized the damnable-ness of their sins, and they became terrified and alarmed on account of them. They realized that the only thing the holy and just God could do with them, was to condemn them on account of their transgressions of His Law. They did not think that God does not care so much after all whether men keep His Law or not; that He cannot get real angry, and cannot punish any one on account of his sins, as so many nominal Christians think nowadays. No they cried out: “*If our transgressions and our sins be upon us, and we pine away in them, how should we then live?*”

And, my beloved friends, what did God Himself have to say? He spoke to them through Ezekiel. What did He say? Did He tell Ezekiel to tell those alarmed and terrified Israelites, “O ye

house of Israel, be not concerned and troubled about your sins, because all people are sinners, for I will close Mine eyes to your iniquities therefore be of good cheer and do not pine away on account of your transgressions; everything will come out all right in the end: all people will be finally saved, for I could not condemn any human being eternally"? Did God tell Ezekiel to speak in this manner to the Israelites? Surely not; He could not have spoken thus, because He is holy and just; He must hate and punish sin; He cannot wink at iniquity. He says in His Law: "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." Ezekiel 18. 20. But God would much rather that the sinner repent and live. Therefore He told the prophet to say unto the Israelites: "*As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways: for why will ye die, O house of Israel?*"

From these words of the Lord we can clearly see that He has compassion upon the wicked, the sinners; that He is graciously disposed towards them. He even swears by His own life, that He has no pleasure in the death, that is, in the eternal death or damnation, of the sinner. Yes, God is also very gracious. He promises life and salvation to every wicked one who will turn from his wickedness to his gracious Lord God.

How is it possible, my beloved friends, that the holy and just God can be gracious to the transgressors of His Law, to sinful men? This is possible only for one reason. And which is that one and only reason? St. Paul answers this question, saying: "When the fulness of time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the Law, to redeem them that were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." Gal. 4. 4. 5. The time of which St. Paul here speaks, was the time of prophecy. After the fall of man God had given him the gracious promise that He would save him, for God said to the wily seducer of man: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, between thy seed and her Seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise His heel." Gen. 3. 15. And thereafter God made many promises concerning the Savior through His prophets. When this time of prophecy had come to an end, the Savior came, being born of the Virgin Mary in a stable at Bethlehem. And He fulfilled the Law of God perfectly for all mankind, and gave Himself a sacrifice for all sinners, when He suffered and died for them on the accursed tree. Yes, "God made Him to be

sin for us, who knew no sin, that we may be made the righteousness of God in Him." 2 Cor. 5, 21. That is the reason why the Prophet Isaiah had cried out: "Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed." Is. 53, 4, 5.

Because Jesus Christ, the Godman Savior of the world, is the "propitiation for our sins, not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world," (1 John 2, 2), therefore God is gracious to sinners. If Jesus Christ had not redeemed us by His bitter suffering and ignominious death on Calvary, God could not and would not be gracious. Without Jesus Christ God is a consuming fire, a jealous God, visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation (Exodus 20, 5). God's grace is founded on Christ's work of redemption; for Christ's sake He declares the unjust to be just; for Christ's sake He forgives the sins unto the sinners. God does not look at anything that is in man, He does not look to the merits of man, but only to the merits of His only-begotten Son Jesus Christ. That is the reason why the holy and just God can be gracious unto sinners. When Jesus had cried out from the cross: "It is finished!" the work of redemption had been completed; God had been reconciled to the sinful world. That this is true, God proved by the fact that He raised up His Son on the third day. Yes, by the glorious resurrection of His Son the heavenly Father solemnly declared that He was perfectly satisfied with the redemptive work of Jesus Christ.

For whom is the grace of God in store? This question I shall answer in the second place.

2.

According to the Bible God is gracious to *all* sinners; His grace is in store, is intended, for *sinful mankind*. When He says in our text: "*As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked,*" God declares His grace to be *universal*. This truth, however, is denied by many churches.

The *Roman Catholic Church* teaches that it is the *only saving* church, that is, it teaches that no one can be eternally saved, unless he is a member of the Roman Catholic Church; that without the Church of Rome there is salvation for no one. The

Roman Catholic Church, therefore, denies that God's grace is universal.

The *Calvinistic Churches* teach that the grace of God is intended for those only who are finally saved; that all those who are eternally lost never were under God's grace; that God passed by them with His grace. But also these doctrines are unbiblical, they are wrong.

God's grace is intended for all sinful men, all sinners from Adam down to the last one that lives when the Lord Jesus shall come in great power and glory to judge the quick and the dead. God's invitation is *general*, for He says: "Come; for all things are now ready!" Luke 14, 17. Does God not invite the *wicked*, even all those wicked, who never repent, or turn to Him? Does He not invite all, when He cries out: "Look unto Me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else!" Is. 45, 22? Yes, He even swears that He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. What does that mean? Does it not mean that His grace is in store for all?

It is impossible to understand how any one can conceive the idea that God's grace is not in store for *all* sinners. The whole Gospel is nothing else than a message of God's grace to *all* sinners in the world. The Gospel tells us that God sent forth His only-begotten Son to redeem the whole sinner-world. Jesus Himself said: "The Son of Man is come to save that which was *lost*." Matt. 18, 11. John the Baptist cried out, pointing to Jesus of Nazareth: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the *world*." John 1, 29. The Apostle John says of Jesus Christ that "He is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the *whole world*." 1 John 2, 2. Jesus said to Nicodemus: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so the Son of Man must be lifted up; that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the *world*, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the *world*; but that the *world* through Him might be saved." John 3, 14—17. Jesus commissioned His disciples, His Church, to go and baptize all *nations*, and to preach the Gospel to every *creature*, every sinful man. (Matt. 28, 19; Mark 16, 15.) If the Bible teaches anything at all, it surely teaches that the grace of God is in store for mankind, for all sinners.

And yet, beloved friends, we know from this same Bible, that not all sinners are eternally saved. Why not? The answer is, Because not all sinners accept God's grace, or as St. Peter expresses it: "They deny the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction." 2 Pet. 2, 1.

Many people, even many people that belong to some Christian congregation, imagine that people must first do away with their sins and wickedness, before God's grace is theirs. Oh, how foolish such a thought is! No man can forsake his wickedness until he accepts Jesus Christ as his Savior by true faith. Without faith in the Savior of the sinful world, so the Bible teaches, man is spiritually blind and dead, and an enemy of God. (See: 1 Cor. 2, 14; Eph. 2, 1; Rom. 8, 7.) I ask, How can a dead person do anything which is pleasing unto God? It is very foolish to suppose that a spiritually dead person can do that which is well-pleasing to God; no, he must first become spiritually alive, before he can turn from his wickedness and serve God.

A sinner becomes spiritually alive through faith in Jesus Christ as his only Savior and Redeemer. As soon as a sinner accepts Jesus Christ as his Savior and Redeemer from sin, death, and the power of the devil, so soon he can turn from his wickedness and cheerfully serve God. Think of the Philippian jailor! As soon as he accepted Jesus as his Savior, he willingly served Him by serving His servants Paul and Silas. Think of the publicans and sinners who came to Jesus! As soon as they accepted Jesus as their Savior, they turned from sin unto righteousness, and cheerfully served Him (Luke 19, 1—9). Think of the malefactor to the right hand side of Jesus on the cross! As soon as he accepted Jesus as his Savior, he repented of his wickedness. The malefactor to the left side of Jesus did not believe in Jesus, and therefore he did not turn from his wickedness and died in his sins. It was his own fault that he was not saved. God's grace was in store for him as well as for his associate in crimes.

A sinner must first believe in Jesus Christ as his Savior before he can renounce his wickedness and ungodliness. Only a good tree will bring forth good fruit. If all sinners would accept Jesus as their Savior and Redeemer, all would be eternally saved. But so many do not do that, and consequently they are lost by their own fault. God's grace was in store for them also, but they despised and rejected it, because they trusted in themselves, that

is, in their own righteousness and holiness, which are nothing but filthy rags in God's sight (Is. 64, 6).

Let us, then, beloved friends, take to heart the word of God in our text and in many other passages of Holy Writ, so that we may not despise God's grace, not die in our sins, but that we may live eternally. Let us embrace Jesus Christ by true faith and cling to Him in life and in death, then, as surely as the Lord lives, we will not see death, but we will pass through death unto life everlasting. Yes, God's grace is in store for every sinner! Salvation is without a price, it is free, not only to Paul and Magdalene, but also to you and to me! Eternal life is given us through a believing look to Jesus, who died for us that we might live eternally. Look to Jesus, and be eternally saved! God grant that no one of us may look to himself for salvation, but alone to Jesus Christ, the one and only Savior of the lost sinner-world! Amen.

Twelfth Sunday after Trinity.

Mark 8, 22—25.

And He cometh to Bethsaida; and they bring a blind man unto Him, and besought Him to touch him. And He took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town; and when He had spit on his eyes, and put His hands upon him, He asked him if he saw aught. And he looked up and said, I see men as trees, walking. After that He put His hands again upon his eyes, and made him look up; and he was restored, and saw every man clearly.

Reading the Bible carefully, it must strike us that it says so much of supplications, prayers, and intercessions. In various places of the Holy Scripture we are enjoined to pray, and we also always receive the promise that our prayers shall not be made in vain. In the 50th Psalm the Lord says: "Call upon Me in the day of trouble, I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me." According to the seventh chapter of St. Matthew Jesus says: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." And again in the 145th Psalm David says by inspiration of the Holy Spirit: "The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon Him, to all that call upon Him in truth. He will fulfil the desire of them that fear Him; He also will hear their cry, and will save them."

The Bible, furthermore, tells us that God's children always were very diligent in their prayers and supplications. It also tells us what they prayed for, and how God heard and answered their prayers. Therefore a psalmist of old said unto the Lord: "When Thou saidst, Seek ye My face; my heart said unto Thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek." Ps. 27, 8.

But, beloved friends, it is not only God's will that all of His children should pray for *themselves*, but that they should also diligently pray for *others*: for their fellow-Christians, fellow-men, yea, even for their enemies. Jesus says: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Matt. 5, 44); and His holy Apostle Paul writes to Timothy: "I exhort therefore, that first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peace-

able life in all godliness and honesty." 1 Tim. 2, 1. 2. And the Apostle James admonishes all Christians to pray for one another (James 5, 16).

Whenever we pray for others, we make intercession for them at the throne of God. This Christian intercession should not be neglected by us. God's children, as we learn from the Holy Scriptures, always interceded for their fellow-men. Think, for example, of Abraham's intercession for Lot; the Syrophenician woman's intercession for her daughter; St. Stephen's intercession for his murderers; Moses' intercession for the Israelites, and the intercessions of the holy apostles for their fellow-Christians and fellow-men.

In the text before us for our present contemplation we also have an example of Christian intercession. By the assistance of the Holy Spirit, and in accordance with our text, let me now speak to you of —

Christian Intercession.

Let me show,

1. *That it is pleasing to the Lord, and*
2. *That it is never made in vain.*

1.

St. Mark says of Jesus in our text: "*And He cometh to Bethsaida; and they bring a blind man unto Him, and besought Him to touch him.*"

As we see from the chapter preceding our text, Jesus had been in the borders of Tyre and Sidon. A Syrophenician woman had come to Him, making intercession for her young daughter, who was possessed with an unclean spirit. Jesus tested her faith, and finally He said unto her: "Go thy way; the devil is gone out of thy daughter." When she came home, she found her daughter well. What Jesus had done unto this poor Syrophenician woman and her young daughter, soon became known throughout all that region, yea, even the people living around the Sea of Galilee had heard the good news. So when Jesus came to the coasts of Decapolis, some people brought a deaf-mute man unto Him, and they besought Him that He should lay His hands upon the poor deaf-mute, and heal him. Jesus did as He had been requested to do, as we see from our today's Gospel-lesson. When Jesus had come to Bethsaida, a city situated on the east side of the Jordan near the Sea of Galilee, other people, who also had heard of Jesus

and His great miracles, brought a blind man to Him, and they besought Him, that He should touch him and heal him of his blindness. They made intercession for the blind man. It is true, they asked Jesus to bestow a great blessing upon the poor blind man, but they were quite sure that Jesus *could* and *would* answer their prayer. St. Mark says in our text that they besought Jesus to touch the blind man. They believed that Jesus could give him his sight by the touch of His hand. That was strong faith indeed.

This true Christian intercession was pleasing unto the Lord. It could not have been otherwise. Jesus, being our Highpriest, Himself makes intercession for us and our fellows. His Great Intercession for His people, recorded in the seventeenth chapter of St. John, is proof for this fact. Besides this chapter we find other passages in the Bible which tell us of Christ's intercession for His own. The Epistle to the Hebrews assures us of the blessed fact that Jesus intercedes for His people with His Father, for it says (7, 25): "Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them." And St. John tells us that Jesus is our Advocate with the Father (1 John 2, 1). What is an advocate? An advocate is one who intercedes for some one. If Jesus Himself intercedes for us, then, my beloved friends, there cannot be the least doubt that it is pleasing to Him, if we intercede for others. Therefore St. James admonishes us and all Christians to pray for each other (5, 16).

Whenever, therefore, we intercede for our fellow-Christians or our fellow-men, we can be quite certain that our Christian intercession in their behalf is most pleasing unto the Lord. And for this reason a true Christian intercession, like all Christian prayers, is never made in vain. Of this I shall now speak to you in the second place.

2.

What did Jesus do when those people brought that blind man unto Him, and when they besought Him to touch him. St. Mark tells us in our text: "*And He took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town; and when He had spit on his eyes, and put His hands upon him, He asked Him if he saw aught. And he looked up and said, I see men as trees, walking. After that He put His hands again upon his eyes, and made him look up; and he was restored, and saw every man clearly.*"

From these words of our text it is evident that the Christian

intercession of those people was not made in vain; they were not put to shame. Indeed, it was a great petition which they had made, but it was not too great for the almighty Son of God, for with Him nothing is impossible. When they saw that Jesus took the blind man by the hand and led him away out of the town, they undoubtedly were strengthened in their faith that He would help him, for if He had not been willing to grant them their petition, Jesus would not have done what He did. Yea, when Jesus put His hands on the eyes of the blind man all those that saw it, rejoiced. Why? Because they now were quite sure that He would heal him of his blindness; they knew that their intercession had not been made in vain. Why Jesus did not restore his sight at once, we are not told, but He surely had some reasons for it. Perhaps He wished to prove their faith in Him. If such was the case, they stood the test quite well, for after the Lord had put His hands upon the eyes of the blind man a second time his sight was fully restored.

Jesus never changes. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebr. 13, 8). Whenever we pray for ourselves, or for others, and do it with a believing heart as those people did who brought that blind man to Jesus, He will answer our prayers. He cannot do otherwise, because He Himself has promised to hear all Christian prayers and intercessions, and His promises are always sure, for He cannot lie.

But, perhaps, some one may say, "It cannot be denied that Jesus indeed answered the prayers of those people at Bethsaida and many others who brought people unto Him suffering from various diseases, but He does not do it any longer, for I have often prayed for myself and for others, but He has neither heard, nor answered my prayers and intercessions."

My dear fellow-Christians, you are very much mistaken when you believe that the Lord does not answer the prayers and intercessions of His people at all times! He always does hear and He always answers every Christian prayer and intercession. If the Lord has not answered your prayers and intercessions then, beloved friend, there was something wrong with *you*, but not with the *Lord*. The Lord does answer every prayer, supplication, and intercession that is made in a God-pleasing manner. Of course, He does not answer every prayer and intercession as we imagine that He should do it, but, nevertheless, He hears and answers every Christian intercession and prayer in His own good way,

and according to His good and gracious will. He often answers our Christian prayers and intercessions far above our understanding. Very often we do not realize that He really has answered our prayers and intercessions. For instance, beloved fellow-Christian, perhaps you have prayed and interceded for one of your beloved ones who has been sick for a long time, and, up to this time, he was not healed from his sickness; nevertheless, you must confess that God answered your intercession, because He has given the sick one Christian patience, or He has greatly increased his faith, or He has given him strong hope of eternal life. My dear fellow-Christian, I ask, Is that not an answer to your intercession? Most assuredly it is. God has heard you far above your understanding. Or again, if God has taken your beloved one away from this vale of tears unto Himself in heaven by a blessed end, pray, tell me, has He not given answer to your intercession? Indeed, He has. He really has heard you most wonderfully, for He has given unto your beloved one everlasting happiness and eternal life.

If, however, God does not answer your prayer or you intercession at all, then He does not do it, because you have not prayed in *accordance with His will*. All prayers and intercessions made against the revealed will of God are, indeed, made in vain. How often do not even we Christians pray against the revealed will of God! Very often we pray and intercede according to our own, but not at all according to God's will. Very often we do not say, "Thy will be done!" but rather, "My will be done!" It is God's revealed will that, when we pray for temporal blessings, we should always say: "Not my will, but Thine, be done" (Luke 22, 42). That is what Jesus Himself did; and we must follow His example, otherwise we do not pray in accordance with God's will. How often, furthermore, my beloved fellow-Christians, do we not pray and intercede with a *disbelieving heart*, or at least, with a *doubting heart*! If those people, spoken of in our text, had not firmly believed that Jesus could and would answer their intercession for the blind man, then, of course, their intercession should have been made in vain, for the Lord never answers a prayer or an intercession that is made with a doubting or disbelieving heart. Jesus Himself has said: "All things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." Matt. 21, 22.

In all our prayers and intercessions we must also bear in mind that *we are not worthy* of any blessings for which we pray.

We dare not rely upon our own righteousness and goodness, but we must always and only rely upon the righteousness and merits of Jesus Christ. It is very much displeasing to God if any one trusts in himself, that is, in his own righteousness, goodness, and merits. That is what the Pharisee did, who went into the Temple to pray. Jesus says of him that he went down to his house unjustified. And those for whom others pray must under no circumstances think for a moment that those praying and interceding for them before the throne of God, are worthy to be heard. It often occurs that Christian people believe that the prayers and intercessions of pastors and church officers will be heard by the Lord, because they are good men. If we should think thus, my beloved fellow-Christians, we would be putting our trust in men, and by doing that we would sin, for God says in His Word: "Cursed be the man that trusteth in man." Jer. 17, 5. Therefore all of those who pray to the saints that they might intercede for them, are committing a great sin. They are idolaters. Though we, my beloved fellow-Christians, should pray for others, and have others pray for us, we must not trust in our own, nor in our fellow-Christians' worthiness; but, as I have already said, solely and alone in the worthiness of our blessed Savior Jesus Christ, that is, in His person and work of redemption. We are told in our text that Jesus took the blind man by the hand and led him out of town. Why did He do that? I suppose for no other reason than to call the attention of the blind man as well as of the interceders to Himself. He wanted them to look to Him for help. Thus it must be to this very day. We are worthy of none of the things for which we pray, but Jesus, our dear Savior, is. For His sake the Father in heaven will answer the prayers and intercessions of all those who come to Him by Jesus, that is, by trusting in Jesus alone.

Perhaps, my beloved fellow-Christians, some of us have been very negligent in our prayers and intercessions in the *past*. Let us all be very diligent in them in the *future*! True Christian intercessions are needed at all times, and all of us are in need of them. We are now living in very critical times. Oh, beloved fellow-Christians, let us therefore not grow weary in our prayers, supplications, and intercessions! Let us daily pray the Lord for forgiveness of our sins, and for His gracious assistance in all our undertakings! Let us all pray and intercede, trusting in Jesus,

our one and only Savior! Then we shall neither pray nor intercede in vain. Therefore, my dear fellow-Christians, —

Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged, —
Take it to the Lord in prayer.
Can we find a Friend as faithful
Who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness, —
Take it to the Lord in prayer.

Are we weak and heavy laden,
Cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Savior, still our Refuge, —
Take it to the Lord in prayer.
Do thy friends despise, forsake thee?
Take it to the Lord in prayer;
In His arms He'll take and shield thee,
Thou wilt find a solace there.

Yes, indeed, if we pray for ourselves or for others, we shall neither pray nor intercede in vain if we will pray and intercede in a God-pleasing manner, trusting in Jesus Christ.

May God grant, for the sake of Jesus Christ, our dear Savior and Redeemer, that we make all our prayers and intercessions according to His will, with a believing heart, and trusting — not in our own, nor our fellow-Christians' worthiness, but solely and alone in the worthiness of Jesus Christ! Amen.

Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity.

Matt. 12, 46—50.

While He yet talked to the people, behold, His mother and His brethren stood without, desiring to speak with Him. Then one said unto Him, Behold, Thy mother and Thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with Thee. But He answered and said unto him that told Him, Who is My mother? and who are My brethren? And He stretched forth His hand toward His disciples, and said, Behold My mother and My brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of My Father which is in heaven, the same is My brother, and sister, and mother.

The Gospel-lesson for this Sunday tells us that Jesus pronounced His disciples blessed, because they had accepted Him as the one and only Savior of sinful mankind. A certain lawyer, who heard Jesus, stood up, and tempted Him, saying: "Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus answered and said unto him: "What is written in the Law? How readest thou?" The lawyer answered: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself." Jesus told the lawyer that he had answered correctly, and said that he should do what the Law required of him, and then he should live, that is, be eternally saved. The lawyer did not misunderstand Jesus, for he knew that Jesus wanted to tell him that neither he nor any other man could do as the Law enjoined; but he did not want to confess his incapability of fulfilling the Law perfectly, and therefore he asked Jesus: "Who is my neighbor?" In answering this question of the lawyer, Jesus replied, saying: "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence; and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.

Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbor unto him that fell among thieves?" The lawyer said: "He that showed mercy on him." Then said Jesus to him: "Go, and do thou likewise."

When Jesus told that self-righteous and self-complacent lawyer to go, and do as the Samaritan had done, He gave him to understand that He acknowledged the Samaritan as one of His own, and that he, the lawyer, would have to become an altogether different person, if he ever would be regarded by Jesus as one of His disciples. Jesus does not by any means look upon all of those as His own beloved disciples who consider themselves such, as we can also clearly see from our text. In accordance with the same, and by the assistance of the Holy Spirit, let me now give answer to this important question:—

Whom Does Jesus Acknowledge as His Own?

I answer,

1. *Not those who are only outwardly connected with Him, but*
2. *Only those who are connected with Him by the ties of true faith and willing service.*

1.

The incident, recorded in our text, occurred after Jesus had cast out a devil from a man who was blind and dumb. After the Lord had cast out the devil, the man could see and speak. That was, indeed, a great miracle. When the people saw what Jesus of Nazareth had done, they were amazed, and they said: "Is not this the Son of David?" The term, *Son of David*, was applied to the promised Messiah. The people meant to say that this Jesus of Nazareth must be the promised Messiah, the Savior of the world. But when the Pharisees heard what the people were saying, they contended that Jesus of Nazareth was by no means that Son of David, but rather a man who performed that wonder by the help of the chief of the devils. Jesus told them that they were lying, for a devil never could drive out a devil. If that ever should be the case, then the kingdom of darkness should fall. And turning to the Pharisees, He denounced them for their hypocrisy, saying: "O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things; and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. But I say unto you, That

every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the Day of Judgment." But the Pharisees and scribes were not ready to confess that Jesus had, indeed, spoken the truth, but some of them asked Him to show them a sign or miracle. Oh, the poor, deluded fools that they were! Jesus had just showed them a sign, for the healing of that demoniac was a great miracle. Jesus, therefore, told them that no other sign should be given them than the sign of Jonas, meaning His death, burial, and resurrection. And then He told them that even the people of Nineveh would rise in judgment with them, because they had repented when Jonas preached unto them, and that He, Jesus, was by far more than Jonas, and yet they would not repent.

"While He yet talked to the people," so St. Matthew tells us in our text, "*behold, His mother and His brethren stood without, desiring to speak with Him. Then one said unto Him, Behold Thy mother and Thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with Thee.*"

Who were those relatives of the Lord Jesus Christ? We all know very well who His *mother* was. But, my friends, who were those *brethren* of His? Did Jesus have true brothers? Who is meant by those "brethren" of Jesus? We cannot know with certainty who they were, for the Greek word "adelphos" does not only mean a true brother, but it may also mean a halfbrother, a stepbrother, a cousin, yea, even a brother in the faith. Some theologians hold the opinion that they were true brothers of Jesus, because the Bible says that Mary brought forth her firstborn son when she gave birth to Jesus (Luke 2, 7). Others are of the opinion that they were halfbrothers, children of Joseph by a former marriage. Still others are of the opinion that they were first cousins of Jesus. This opinion, so it seems to me, is the correct one. It is probable that they were the sons of Alphaeus, also known as Cleophas and Clopas, whose wife was a sister of Mary, the mother of Jesus. (See: John 19, 25; Matt. 13, 55; Acts 1, 13).

Whether or not the "brethren" of Jesus, spoken of in our text, were His true brothers, or halfbrothers, or cousins, is immaterial. The truth is that at *that time* they were not true believers in Jesus Christ. They did not believe that He was the real Son of God, the one and only Savior of sinful men. And therefore Jesus did not acknowledge them as His own, as His true

disciples. Yea, it seems that even His mother for the time being was in great danger of losing her faith in Him.

St. Matthew tells us that the mother of Jesus and His brethren had come, desiring to speak with Him. But why did they wish to speak with Him? Did they wish to strengthen Him in His work? Did they wish to encourage Him to do the will of His Father in heaven? No, not at all, for St. Mark tells us that they tried to have Him desist from preaching and performing miracles, because they thought that He had lost His mind (Mark 3, 21). Though they were His nearest relatives, Jesus could not acknowledge them as being His own, His true disciples. When, therefore, some one told Jesus: "Behold Thy mother and Thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with Thee," Jesus stretched forth His hand toward His disciples, and said, "*Behold My mother and My brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of My Father which is in heaven, the same is My brother, and sister, and mother.*"

Whom, then, does Jesus acknowledge as His own? *Not those who are only outwardly connected with Him.*

There are millions upon millions of people in this world, who consider themselves disciples of Jesus Christ, true Christians, but they are not what they would be. Yea, there are even many in our dear Lutheran Church who are not Christ's own. They believe that they belong to Him, because they at one time have been baptized and confirmed, and because they occasionally go to church and partake of the Supper of the Lord, or because they pay their church-dues, and because their names are still on the church-roll; but they are sadly mistaken. Jesus does not acknowledge them as His own. Why not? Because they are only outwardly connected with Him, His Word, and His Church. Their heart is far from Jesus. If you have nothing else to show than your certificate of baptism, your certificate of confirmation, and a receipt for the payment of your church-dues, then, my friend, your Savior will not acknowledge you as His own, and on the great Day of Judgment He will deny you before His heavenly Father, as He here denied those "brethren" of His. Therefore repent this very day, my dear friend, and see to it that you become connected with Jesus by the ties of true faith and willing service. Then, and then only, will He acknowledge you as one of His own. Of this fact I shall now speak to you in the second place.

2.

When that man went into the house in which Jesus was, and told Him that His mother and brethren were standing without, desiring to speak with Him, Jesus said: "*Who is My mother? and who are My brethren? And He stretched forth His hand toward His disciples, and said, Behold My mother and My brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of My Father which is in heaven, the same is My brother, and sister, and mother.*"

Who, then, were the disciples of Jesus toward whom He stretched forth His hand, and cried out: "*Behold My mother and My brethren!*" What kind of men were they, my beloved friends? Answer: In the eyes of the chiefs of the Jews, they were nothing at all. As the Bible tells us, they were mostly poor fishermen and publicans, people who were despised by the higher and middle classes of the Jewish nation. And it may be that even the brethren of Jesus, spoken of in our text, despised them. But Jesus does not look upon men as men do; He is not a respecter of persons. It is an established fact that most of the disciples of Jesus at all times were recruited from the ranks of the poor and despised among men. St. Paul, who himself was one of the most learned men that ever lived, wrote the Corinthian Christians: "*For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, nor many mighty, nor many noble, are called; but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in His presence.*" 1 Cor. 1, 26—29.

But the disciples, though despised by men, were acknowledged by Jesus as His own, as great and noble men. In the Gospel-lesson for this Sunday Jesus pronounces them blessed men, saying unto them: "*Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see; for I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.*" Why, then, beloved friends, did Jesus regard His disciples as such blessed, great, and noble men? I answer, *Because they were connected with Him by the ties of true faith and willing service.* They did the will of His heavenly Father. And what is the will of His Father in heaven? Jesus Himself gives an-

swer to this important question, when He says: "This is the will of Him which sent Me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on Him, may have everlasting life." John 6, 40. That is what the apostles and disciples of Jesus did. They accepted Jesus of Nazareth as the very Son of God, as the Messiah, the Savior of all sinful men. They firmly believed that He was the promised Savior of the world, and for this very reason they loved Him and served Him with a willing and cheerful heart. They truly loved Him, and therefore they had left all and followed Him. For this cause Jesus stretched forth His hand toward them and said: "Behold My mother and My brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of My Father which is in heaven, the same is My brother, and sister, and mother."

Thus it is to this very day, my beloved friends. All those who really believe in Jesus Christ as their one and only Savior, will also willingly and cheerfully serve Him. They never complain that they must do too much for the Savior and His kingdom. No, they regret that they cannot do far more than they are doing. With them nothing is too good, nor too much for the Savior. Whenever you hear people of the church complain about the preacher begging too much for the kingdom of Jesus Christ and about sending away too much money for missions and benevolent institutions, then, my beloved friend, you can be quite sure that you are hearing people who are not Christ's own, but such as are only outwardly connected with Him, that is, hypocrites. True Christians are altogether different. True Christians are like unto that good Samaritan, spoken of in our today's Gospel-lesson; they love their God and Savior with all their heart, and for the sake of their God and Savior they also love their fellow-Christians and fellow-men, and they do all they possibly can to serve them, for they know that they are serving their God and Savior by helping the poor and needy among their fellows. And they are in deed and in truth true Christians, and Christ acknowledges them as His own, for they are connected with Him by the ties of true faith and willing service.

And — O how blessed they are! On the great Day of Judgment, when all the nations of the earth shall be gathered before the judgment-seat of Jesus, then, beloved friends, Jesus will acknowledge them as His own before His heavenly Father and all the heavenly hosts. O what joy shall then fill their hearts!

O what blessedness, when the Judge shall stretch forth His hand toward them, and say: "*Behold My mother and My brethren!*"

From the first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles we learn that the "brethren" of Jesus later became believers in Him, and, therefore, members of the Christian Church. And as soon as they had become true members of the Holy Christian Church they also became connected with Jesus by the ties of true faith and willing service.

Should there be any among us this day, who so far have been connected with Jesus only outwardly, that is, who are members of a visible church or congregation, but not members of the Invisible Church, the Holy Christian Church; who so far *confessed* faith in Jesus Christ, but *have it not*, and, therefore, heretofore did not truly serve their Savior with a willing and cheerful heart, then let them repent this very day, and go to Jesus as poor penitent sinners! He will accept them as His own and they will be blessed forevermore.

And may all of those among us, who thus far have truly believed in Jesus Christ as their one and only Savior, and who have willingly and cheerfully served Him, continue to believe in Him, and serve Him with willing and cheerful hearts and hands unto their blessed end! Yes, beloved fellow-Christians, let us daily pray to our dear Savior, saying with all our heart:—

Give me a faithful heart,
Likeness to Thee,
That each departing day
Henceforth may see
Some work of love begun,
Some deed of kindness done,
Some wand'rer sought and won,
Something for Thee.

Amen.

Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity.

Genesis 32, 10.

I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth (faithfulness), which Thou hast showed unto Thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands.

At one time Jesus came to a certain village, where He was met by ten lepers. When they beheld Him, they lifted up their voices, and cried unto Him, saying: "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" Leprosy was a dreadful disease. It was nothing short of living death. The leprous were not permitted to mingle with healthy people, because leprosy was a very contagious disease. It was also incurable. It happened that lepers often suffered for twenty years before temporal death relieved them of their horrible sufferings. When those ten lepers saw Jesus they asked Him to heal them. They believed that He could do so, if He would. Jesus was at once willing to cleanse them, and, therefore, He said unto them: "Go, show yourselves unto the priests." And when they went to the priests, they were healed. Jesus had, indeed, shown great mercy unto them. But what happened? All ten had been cleansed, but only one of them showed himself grateful unto the Lord, for only one, who was a Samaritan, returned to Jesus and thanked Him. When he came to Jesus and thanked Him for the mercy which He had experienced, Jesus said: "Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine?"

From these words of the Lord it is evident that He expected all ten to show gratitude unto Him for His gracious help. And, indeed, justly so; for Jesus had shown great mercy unto all of them. It is inconceivable to a truly Christian mind how it was possible that nine of those former lepers could be so ungrateful towards their Benefactor. And yet, dearly beloved fellow-Christians, it occurs very frequently that people, who have experienced the help of the Lord, forget to show gratitude towards Him. How is that possible? Why, so I ask, did not the nine return unto Jesus? I answer, Because they did not feel their unworthiness, as the Samaritan did. The Samaritan felt that he had not deserved such mercy and kindness as Jesus had shown unto him, and that was the reason why he returned to Jesus and thanked Him with all his heart. The nine Jews believed that they, being Abraham's seed, were entitled to the mercy which Jesus showed

unto them. They took it for granted that Jesus had only done His duty towards them. They did not at all feel their own unworthiness, and, therefore, they showed no gratitude towards Him.

A man like unto this grateful Samaritan, is held up to us in our text, beloved friends. It is one of the three great Jewish patriarchs: Jacob, the son of Isaac, and grandson of Abraham. Our text holds him up to us as a fine exemplar of gratitude, and all of us should follow him in his grateful acknowledgment of God's great mercy and faithfulness and his own unworthiness. By the assistance of the Holy Spirit, and in accordance with our text, let me now hold up to you —

Grateful Jacob as an Exemplar for Us and All Christians:

1. *In his acknowledgment of God's great mercy and faithfulness;*
2. *In his acknowledgment of his own sinfulness and unworthiness.*

1.

The words of our text were spoken by Jacob when he returned from Mesopotamia, where he had been twenty years. He had left his home under somewhat tragic circumstances, for his brother Esau wanted to kill him, because he had received the best blessing of his father. Fleeing for his life, Jacob went to Mesopotamia, where his uncle Laban lived. When Jacob left his home he took nothing with him save his staff. He made the far journey afoot. The good Lord provided for him, and finally brought him in safety to his mother's brother. On his journey, at a place which he named Bethel, he took stones for his pillows, and lay down to sleep. While he was sleeping, he had a wonderful vision. In his dream he beheld a ladder reaching from the earth into heaven, and he saw the angels of God ascending and descending on it. "And, behold, the Lord stood above it, and said, I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac. The land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; and thy seed shall be as the dust on the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south; and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee

again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of." Gen. 28, 13—15.

When Jacob came to Mesopotamia he was well received by Laban. He wished to marry the younger daughter of Laban whose name was Rachel. Laban promised to give him his daughter, if he would serve him for seven years. Jacob assented. But when the seven years had elapsed, Laban deceived him, and gave him his older daughter, whose name was Leah. When Jacob reproved him for his action, Laban told him that he would give him Rachel also, if he would serve him seven years longer. To this Jacob consented, for he dearly loved Rachel. After this Jacob served Laban seven more years, and the Lord blessed him greatly. When he left Mesopotamia he had increased exceedingly, and had much cattle, and maidservants, and menservants, and camels, and asses (Gen. 30, 43). Jacob left Mesopotamia, because the Lord Himself had told him to go back to his father's country. He took with him his wives and children, maidservants and menservants, and all his stock. When he had crossed the brook Jabbok, which flows into the Jordan from the east, he received word that his brother Esau was on his way to meet him with 400 men. Jacob became sore afraid, for he was of the opinion that Esau had come to avenge himself. For this reason he divided all he had into two bands, saying: "If Esau come to the one company, and smite it, then the other company which is left shall escape." Then he cried out: "O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the Lord which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee. I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth (faithfulness), which Thou hast showed unto Thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands."

Indeed, God had thus far not only blessed, but also protected Jacob in a wonderful way. And Jacob realized the great mercy and kindness of the Lord, and he acknowledged God's great mercy and faithfulness, saying: "*I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth (faithfulness), which Thou hast showed unto Thy servant.*"

Like Jacob, my beloved friends, we should also acknowledge the great mercies and kindnesses which we have experienced as gifts of God. Yes, we should follow Jacob's example.

Every one of us has experienced God's mercy and faithfulness. How often were we not ill, perhaps, seriously ill, and our

beloved ones despaired of our recovery. We and our beloved ones cried to God for His help, and He answered the cry and we were restored to health. Again, the Lord has given every one of us everything necessary for the support of our temporal life. To many among us He has given by far more than they need for the support of their bodies; He has given wealth unto them. Again, He has given us a pious spouse, healthy and bright children, good friends, and faithful neighbors. Do you do what Jacob did? Do you acknowledge God's mercy and faithfulness towards you?

Again, think of the manifold spiritual blessings which God has bestowed upon you! By nature you were a child of wrath, even as others (Eph. 2, 3). But what has God done? Did He not send His only Son that He might redeem you from sin, death, and the power of the devil? Indeed, He did, for the only-begotten Son of God, Jesus Christ, became your Savior. He suffered and died for you that you might live. All His merits His Father appropriates to you through the means of grace. Already in your infancy God, through Baptism has washed away your sins, and accepted you as His dear child. And as often as you have sinned after your baptism, God has graciously forgiven you all your sins for the sake of His Son, as often as you have asked Him to do so. O the great mercy and faithfulness of God which you have experienced from your infancy to this present time! Do you realize what God has done for and to you, my beloved fellow-Christians? Do you acknowledge His great mercy and faithfulness, as Jacob did?

And, finally, what did the good and gracious Lord do unto you when temptations, trials, tribulations, sorrows, and bereavements came upon you? Did He not do unto you what He did unto Jacob? Did He not comfort you through His precious promises? Did He not remind you of His mercy and faithfulness, and thus gave you strength and hope in your conflicts with sin, world, and devil? And do you realize that it is God, who in great mercy and faithfulness is ever upholding you in all your adversities, trials, tribulations, sorrows, and bereavements? Do you acknowledge God's mercy and faithfulness towards you as Jacob did, my dear fellow-Christians?

You will follow Jacob in his acknowledgement of God's mercy and faithfulness, if you will feel your own sinfulness and unworthiness as he did. Of this I shall now speak to you in the second place.

2.

Jacob cried out: *"I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth (faithfulness), which Thou hast showed unto Thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands!"*

Jacob was a descendant of truly great and pious men. His grandfather was Abraham, and his father, Isaac. In the Holy Scriptures Abraham is called the Friend of God (James 2, 23; 2 Chron. 20, 7; Is. 41, 8); and the Father of all Believers (Rom. 4). He was a hero of the faith (Hebr. 11, 8—10). God appeared unto him at various places and at different times (Gen. 12, 1; 13, 14; 15, 1; 17, 1; 18, 1; 21, 12; 22, 1). He received the promise that Messiah should come from him according to the flesh (Gen. 22, 18). Likewise Isaac, the father of Jacob, was a great and pious man. He also received the promise that he should become the father of Messiah according to the flesh (Gen. 26, 4). He was very rich (Gen. 26, 12—14). He was a hero of faith, like his father had been (Hebr. 11, 17—20). So also Jacob. He was very rich (Gen. 30, 43). He also had received the promise that Messiah should come from him according to the flesh (Gen. 28, 14). God also appeared to him as He had done to Abraham and Isaac. He is also enumerated with the heroes of faith in the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews. Yea, God Himself honored these three men in an extraordinary way by calling Himself the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob (Exod. 3, 6. 16).

But, beloved friends, Jacob, this great and pious, mighty and rich man, acknowledges his unworthiness before God, crying out: *"I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth (faithfulness), which Thou hast showed unto Thy servant!"* He realized his unworthiness, because he realized his sinfulness. Yes, Jacob, though he was a great and pious man, was also a sinner, and he knew it, for he was not a self-righteous and self-complacent fool. He felt that, on account of his shortcomings and sins, he had deserved nothing but God's wrath and displeasure, temporal death, and eternal damnation. But God had been so gracious unto him. He had so bountifully blessed him with temporal and spiritual gifts. Therefore he could not do otherwise, he had to acknowledge God's great mercy and faithfulness toward him, and his own sinfulness and unworthiness before the good and gracious God. Had Jacob not realized his own sinfulness and unworthiness, he never would have cried out: *"I am not*

worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth (faithfulness), which Thou hast showed unto Thy servant!" He would not have shown true Christian gratitude towards the good and gracious Lord.

If we, my beloved friends and fellow-Christians, would show true gratitude towards our good and gracious Lord and Savior, we must by all means realize our own sinfulness and unworthiness before Him, otherwise we shall never be able to do so. That there are many ungrateful people in outer Christendom, cannot be denied. And the reason for this sad fact is this: They imagine that they deserve God's gracious gifts on account of their own piety and goodness. They say, "If we were not such good and pious people, God could not and would not bless us as He has done. We do all we can for Him, and, therefore, it is not more than right that the Lord should bless us in all things." They are self-righteous and self-satisfied people, and consequently they do not realize their own unworthiness and sinfulness, nor the great mercies and faithfulness of the Lord. Of course, all such people are an abomination in the sight of God. God's good and gracious gifts will finally be unto them nothing less than so many millstones about their neck, that will drown them in the sea of perdition. God hates all self-righteous, high-minded, and proud people, whether they be in or out of the churches.

If we would be truly grateful towards our good and gracious God, then, beloved friends, we must, first of all, realize our own sinfulness and unworthiness; realize that we have deserved nothing but God's wrath and displeasure, temporal death, and eternal damnation. Then the mercy and faithfulness of God will stand out before our eyes as monuments of His unspeakable great love, and we will feel as Jacob did, and we will daily confess with him: "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth (faithfulness), which Thou hast showed unto Thy servant"; and with David: "Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits. Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies; who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's" (Ps. 103, 1—5); and with Luther: "I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my mem-

bers, my reason and all my senses, and still preserves them; also clothing and shoes, meat and drink, house and home, wife and children, fields, cattle, and all my goods; that He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life; that He defends me against all danger, and guards and protects me from all evil; and all this purely out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me; for all which it is my duty to thank and praise, to serve and obey Him. This is most certainly true."

How is it with you, my beloved friend? Pray, tell me, Are you as grateful for God's temporal and spiritual blessings, as was Jacob, the Samaritan in our today's Gospel-lesson, David, Luther, and all true Christians at all times? Examine yourself, my beloved friend and fellow-Christian, whether or not you are following them in their gratitude towards God. Blessed are you, forever blessed, if you do, for then you are a true Christian! Then you will daily thank Him for His mercy and faithfulness, goodness and kindness, and sing with the Christian poet with a grateful heart:—

O bless the Lord, my soul!
Let all within me join,
And aid my tongue to bless His name,
Whose favors are divine.

O bless the Lord, my soul!
Nor let His mercies lie
Forgotten in unthankfulness,
And without praises die.

So help us God for the sake of His only-begotten Son Jesus Christ, our one and only Savior! Amen.

Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity.

Matt. 6; 24—34.

No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat? and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air; for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto your stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they toil not, neither do they spin. And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek.) For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

In our text our dear Savior says: *“Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”* That is exactly what most people will not do. Most people are given to anxious cares for their physical welfare, but they in no way manifest anxious cares for their spiritual well-being. If you speak to them about things that pertain to this temporal life, they at once become very much interested in what you say, but if you speak to them about things that pertain to the life in the hereafter, they become disinterested, and you will be speaking to dull ears. These people are continually asking themselves such questions: “What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?” They are continually fretting themselves about the morrow. They are always afraid that they might fall short of the necessities of this life. “They see mountains across their path, and trouble themselves almost to distraction in advance to divine how they will ever get up and over them. They imagine all kinds of evils to themselves, to their fortunes, to their children, and cannot rest

on account of these forebodings. Others, again, are so bent and intent on getting a competency, a standing, an influence, a name in the world, that they forget that they are only strangers and sojourners here, and so labor only for the meat that perishes. And still others are fretted and distracted about how it would be with them, and what they would do, if certain things would happen to them that have happened to others. They are sure they would lose their minds, that they could not live, that they could not stand it; and if they were to get sick, or lose this friend, or become humbled in their circumstances, or happen to die,—oh, dear, what a hurricane of anxiety torments and overwhelms them when they think of it! Nor can they at all get it out of their minds. They even talk about being ‘raving distracted’ at times. The world is full of such people, and even Christians are not much freer from it than others.” (Seiss, p. 914.)

It is this anxious care for the morrow, my friends, to which our dear Savior refers, and against which He so solemnly warns in our text. It is His sincere desire that all of us should dismiss all anxious cares for the morrow. We should, indeed, give heed to His warning. His warning is supported by good and sound reasons. Let us, then, now answer the important question:—

Why Should Christians Dismiss All Anxious Cares for the Morrow?

Because they are,

1. *Altogether worthless;*
2. *Altogether needless;*
3. *Altogether sinful.*

1.

Our text is taken from Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. His audience was composed of His disciples and many other Jews. The Jews at that time had the Word of God in its purity, and many of them were well versed in it; for Josephus tells us that the Jewish children were diligently instructed in the Word of God. It, therefore, cannot be denied that among the Jewish people there were many true believers of God’s Word. But, on the other hand, it cannot be denied that many disbelieved the Word of God. Yea, most of the Jews in our Savior’s time were unbelievers, and, therefore, not God’s children. However, almost all of them made the claim that they trusted in God only, and not in things temporal. Nevertheless, many of them were given to anxious cares for the morrow. This Jesus knew, for He is the

omniscient Son of God. He also knew that anxious cares for the morrow unfit men for the kingdom of God. That is the reason why He exhorted His hearers to dismiss all anxious cares for the morrow. He said to them: "*Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not life more than meat, and the body than raiment?*". And again: "*Which of you, by taking thought, can add one cubit unto his stature?*"

With these words He tells His hearers that all anxious cares for the morrow are altogether *worthless*. Many people mistake His words. They think that Jesus wanted to teach men to be spendthrifts, and that they should be reckless concerning their earthly possessions. No; Jesus does not say, nor does He wish to say, any such things. Jesus Himself was neither a spendthrift nor a waster of earthly possessions. But, on the other hand, He was no miser. He taught and practised true economy. Remember His feeding of five thousand men in the wilderness. He had fed them with five loaves of bread and two fishes. But He taught His disciples true economy. For what did He say to them after all had been fed? He told His disciples to gather up the fragments which remained, so that nothing would be lost. And they gathered up the fragments which remained, twelve basketfuls. (John 6, 5—13). He did the same when He had fed the four thousand with seven loaves of bread and a few fish. His disciples gathered up seven basketfuls of fragments (Mark 8, 5—8). Jesus wants all men to be given to true economy; but He does not want any to be given to anxious cares for the morrow. Anxious cares for the morrow are altogether worthless. Tell me, my friend, what does it profit a man if he frets and distracts himself ever so much about the necessities of this life? Can he cause one grain of seed to spring up, grow and produce fruit through his fretfulness? Has any one at any time ever secured any good results through his anxious cares for the morrow? Show me the man that ever got one morsel of bread, or one piece of cloth, or even a grain of salt through his anxiety and fretfulness. And again, where is the man that has ever been able to add one inch to his stature through his anxious cares? There cannot be the least doubt that all anxious and fretful cares for the morrow are altogether worthless, as worthless as anything can be.

Anxious cares for the morrow are also altogether needless. Of this I shall speak to you in the second place.

2.

Christ Himself tells us in our text that anxious cares for the morrow are altogether *needless*. He says: "*Is not life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air; for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin. And yet I say unto you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?*"

Beloved friends, are not these words of our Savior divine truth? Are they not literally fulfilled every day? Does God not feed and clothe the fowls of the air and the lilies of the field? Surely He does. He provides livelihood for all creatures whom He has given life. "The little songster of the wood, e. g., when the shades of evening come on, mounts up upon his perch among the branches, closes his eyes peacefully, puts his head under his wing, and is in sweet composure all the night long, though rocked by the winds, surrounded by thick darkness, and knowing not where he shall find his next day's meal. He clings to his chosen twig and sleeps without misgivings, and wakes in the morning with a song in his mouth — a song of praise to that God who ever upholds him, and never suffers him to fall or to want." (Seiss, p. 920.) The birds are not given to anxious cares for the morrow. They are very wise; for anxious cares for the morrow are altogether needless.

If God, then, feeds and clothes the birds, yea, all lower creatures, should He not provide food and raiment for us who are by far more to Him than all the lower creatures taken together? Did God not love men so intensely that He gave them His only-begotten Son? Did not His Son, Jesus Christ, come down from heaven to this world, in order to redeem mankind from sin, death, and the power of the devil? Did He not shed His most holy and precious blood for us and all men? Pray tell me, Do you think that God would provide for the lower creatures, whom He did not purchase with the precious blood of His only-begotten Son, and not for us? How dare any rational man deny or even doubt that He will provide us with all that is necessary for the support of our body and life? David spoke the truth when

he said: "I have been young and now am old, yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging for bread." Ps. 37, 25. We must say the very same thing if we would speak the truth. God, in His kind providence, has always provided us with all that we needed. To this very day He has given us food and raiment. He gave it from day to day, from month to month, from year to year. Yea, He even gave us more than we needed. What He has done in the past He will also do in the future. All our anxious cares for the morrow are altogether needless. Should we, then, not dismiss them? Indeed, we should.

It is true, sometimes we suppose that God had forsaken and disowned us; but such thoughts are erroneous, for He cannot forget nor forsake us. "Like a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him." Ps. 103, 13. Think of the Israelites during their journey through the wilderness to Canaan. It lasted forty years; yet not one of them died from starvation. God gave them bread from heaven, and He caused the desert stones to give forth water so that they could drink. And during those forty years their shoes and clothing needed no mending. Of course, that was an extraordinary way of providing for His people, but if extraordinary means are necessary, God will supply them. He can do as He pleases, for He is omnipotent. All anxious cares for the morrow, therefore, are altogether needless. If we will not dismiss them, we sin; for they are altogether sinful. Of this fact I shall speak to you finally.

3.

Anxious cares for the morrow are altogether *sinful*. Those people who are given to anxious cares for the morrow harm themselves in body and soul. We behold many people with care-worn, haggard faces. They are the victims of anxious cares. These, like canker-worms, have destroyed their life-energies, and whitened their hair while they are still young in years. They are done for. They have made life miserable to themselves and to those dependent upon them. Oh, the sinfulness of anxious cares!

Furthermore, anxious, fretful cares are so sinful because those given to them do not believe the precious promises of the provident Father in heaven. God has promised that He will provide for all His creatures. He said: "While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, shall not cease." Gen. 8, 22. "He hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." Hebr. 13, 5. The Son of

God says in our text: "*Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself.*" He promises that God will give what is necessary for the support of our body in this life, if we will only dismiss our anxious cares for the morrow, and first seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness. He promises that God will supply all our wants from day to day as we have need. O precious promises! And His holy Apostle Peter says: "Cast all your cares upon Him; for He careth for you." 1 Pet. 5, 7. But what does he do whose heart is given to anxious cares for the morrow? He disbelieves all these most precious promises of God and says: "God, I cannot believe Thee; I must care for myself, or I'll starve." Is it not a grievous sin if people think and speak thus? Do they not pass the lie to God? God wants all men to believe Him. It is His will that all should put their trust in Him. If they do not do it, they commit sin.

Finally, anxious cares for the morrow prevent men from seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and therefore they are also so sinful. People that are given to anxious, fretful cares for the morrow do not make preparation for their spiritual well-being in the hereafter. They only think of this present life; they forget the one thing most needful. They will see their grievous mistake some time, but then it will be too late to make amends. When, e. g., the rich man opened his eyes in hell, he saw his mistake, but it was then too late. "What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" Mark 8, 36. 37.

How is it with us, beloved friends? Are we seeking the kingdom of God and His righteousness first, or are we neglecting the one thing most needful? If we would not neglect it, then we must by all means dismiss all anxious cares for the morrow; for as long as they occupy our hearts, so long are we unfit for the kingdom of God, so long no true faith in the Savior can be in our hearts.

Let us, then, by the assistance of the Holy Spirit, dismiss all anxious, fretful cares for the morrow. Let us trust the promises of our God and Savior, and daily look to His goodness and kindness to supply us with all that we need while we sojourn in this world. Let us be faithful in performing the work allotted to us,

and be diligently in prayers and supplications to the true God.
He will surely keep His promises, — and *we shall not want*. For

His goodness all our day attends,
His loving-kindness never ends.

This is most certainly true. Amen.

Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity.

John 5, 28, 29.

The hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth: they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.

The Gospel-lesson for this Sunday tells us of a great miracle which Jesus wrought at the gate of Nain.* When He, many of His disciples, and a multitude of people had come to the gate of the city, a dead young man, the only son of a widow, was being carried out to the cemetery to be buried. It was, indeed, a very sad sight! Immediately behind the coffin, which was carried by a few men, a poor widow followed, weeping bitterly. Her only son had been snatched from her side by cruel death. She had hoped that he might be her stay in her old age, but her hope had come to naught. When Jesus saw her, He had compassion upon her, and He said: "Weep not!" And after He had spoken those consoling words, He touched the coffin, crying out with a loud voice: "Young man, I say unto thee, Arise!" Indeed, that was very remarkable, for dead people cannot hear. But, my beloved friends, the dead can hear whenever Jesus speaks to them, and they do as He bids them to do. Jesus is the almighty Son of God, who can do as He pleases, for with Him nothing is impossible. The dead young man heard His voice, and he obeyed; for he sat up, and began to speak. Jesus delivered him to his widowed mother. Yes, the hand of Life had rapped at the chamber of death, and the departed soul of the young man was again united with his body; he was restored to life; grim death had yielded up his prey.

What Jesus did at the gate of Nain, He also did at Capernaum, where He raised up the dead daughter of Jairus, and at Bethany, where He brought forth a man by the name of Lazarus, who had been buried four days (Luke 8, 49-56; John 11, 43, 44).

What Jesus did to the young man at Nain, to the young daughter of Jairus at Capernaum, and to Lazarus at Bethany, He will also do at the last day of this world, on the Day of Judgment. Then His voice will again speak to the dead, and they will hear and obey Him. The bodies of all the dead will then become

* Nain means: Vale of Beauty.

alive again: they will be resurrected; for Jesus Himself says in our text: *"The hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth: they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation."* In accordance with these words of our blessed Savior, and by the assistance of the Holy Spirit, the subject for our present contemplation shall therefore be:—

The Resurrection of the Body.

Let me show,

1. *Why we Christians believe in it;*
2. *That all the dead will experience it;*
3. *What will follow upon it.*

1.

All men of sound mind believe in some God and in the immortality of the human soul. Human reason teaches that there is, yea, must be, a God, and that the human spirit is, and of necessity must be, immortal. People, who deny these facts, do not make good use of their reasoning powers. Neither do those use their reasoning powers rightly, who deny the resurrection of the dead (1 Cor. 15, 36). Men behold the resurrection of nature every year. They see that during the cold and dreary winter months nature is barren and dead, but that in the warm spring-time it is again resurrected and brings forth an abundance of every kind. The snow melts away; the frost escapes the ground, and the soul of nature returns to its dead body and enlivens it; and in a few weeks barren and dead nature lives again; it has been resurrected from its sepulcher. These facts are known not only to true Christians, but also to the unbelievers. But unbelievers do not use their reasoning powers as God would have them use them, and, consequently, they deny the resurrection of the dead. They deny the resurrection of the dead, because they fear it; they do not want to be resurrected from their graves, for they fear the impending Judgment. At all times, therefore, unbelievers have denied the doctrines of Holy Writ in regard to the resurrection of the bodies of the dead.

All unbelievers deny the resurrection of the body. When, for example, St. Paul preached it at Athens, the Athenian philosophers mocked at him (Acts 17, 32). Even among the members of the Christian congregation at Corinth there were some who

denied the resurrection of the body (1 Cor. 15, 12). Among the Jews there were also some who denied the resurrection of the dead. These men were known as Sadducees. St. Matthew tells us, concerning them: "The same day came to Him (Jesus) the Sadducees, which say that there is no resurrection, and asked Him, saying, Master, Moses said, If a man die, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. Now there were with us seven brethren; and the first, when he had married a wife, deceased, and, having no issue, left his wife unto his brother; likewise the second also, and the third, unto the seventh. And last of all the woman died also. Therefore in the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven? For they all had her. Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven. But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." Matt. 22, 23—32. Those Sadducees, indeed, were ignorant of the Old Testament Scriptures, for they give testimony to the resurrection of the dead (Job 19, 25, 26; Js. 26, 19; Dan. 12, 2). Those Jews, who knew the Old Testament Scriptures and believed them, believed in the resurrection of the body. That this is true, we see from the conversation of Jesus with Martha of Bethany. When Jesus said unto her at the tomb of her brother Lazarus: "Thy brother shall rise again," she answered and said: "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day." John 11, 24. And in the Second Book of the Maccabees we find a pious Jew comforting his brethren, saying: "If men kill us, God will raise us up again." 2 Maccabees 2, 14.

The pious Jews of the old dispensation believed in the resurrection of the body, because *God Himself* had taught it in the Old Testament Scriptures. And for this very same reason we Christians also believe in the resurrection of the bodies of all dead men at the last day. Yea, in the New Testament Scriptures this doctrine is set forth even clearer. The words of Jesus in our text are as clear as the light of day; they cannot be misunderstood by any one. He says: "*The hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth.*" And according to the fortieth verse of the sixth chapter

of St. John He said: "This is the will of Him that sent Me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on Him, may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day." Whosoever, therefore, denies the resurrection of the body, cannot be a true Christian, for no one can be a true Christian if he denies the truthfulness of Jesus' sayings. All true Christians at all times and in all places have firmly believed and confessed, *We believe in the resurrection of the body.* That is, as Luther says: "I believe that God at the last day will raise up me and all the dead, and give unto me and all believers in Christ eternal life."

All those who have died will be raised up at the last day of this world. Of this I shall now speak to you in the second place.

2.

Jesus says in our text: "*The hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth.*"

When Jesus says that all those who are *in the graves* shall be resurrected at the last day, He, of course, does not mean to say that those bodies only shall be raised up that have been buried in the ground. No, indeed not. As we know, there were many whose bodies were not buried at all. Many were burned. Others were devoured by ferocious beasts. Still others were let down into the various seas and oceans, and there they were eaten by the fish and other creatures living in the waters. When Jesus says that all shall hear His voice and shall come forth, He means to say that all those, who have died from the beginning of creation to the last day of this world, shall be brought back to life. Not one shall fail to hear His voice and remain unresurrected; no, every one shall come forth; every one shall be resurrected; for He will raise up *all the dead.*

That *all the dead* shall be raised up at the last day, is being denied by many people who claim to be true Christians; yea, there are a number of church denominations in our country that believe and teach that the bodies of the dead will not be raised up at all. Among the deniers of the resurrection of the body, we find the Unitarians, the Quakers, the Swedenborgians, the Liberal Protestants, the Russellites, the Spiritists, and the Christian Scientists.

Again, others teach that one thousand years before the gen-

eral resurrection, the *first* resurrection* shall take place. These people are known as the Millenarians or Chiliasts. They believe and teach that Jesus Christ will raise up from among the dead all true believers or saints one thousand years before the end of this world, and that the resurrected saints will reign with Jesus over all unbelievers in this world for a thousand years. After the thousand years have come to an end, so they say, the unbelievers and godless will be raised up. This doctrine is entertained by many in the different Protestant church denominations, but it is unscriptural, just as the doctrine of the Roman Catholics concerning purgatory, is unscriptural. The Bible does not teach any such doctrines. In our text Jesus says: "The hour is coming in the which *all* that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth." There is but *one* resurrection of the body, and this resurrection will take place at the last day of this world. And again, in that passage which I have already quoted, Jesus says: "This is the will of Him that sent Me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on Him, may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up *at the last day*." If the Millenarians or Chiliasts were correct, Jesus would have said: "I will raise him up a thousand years before the last day." It is inconceivable how people, who have the New Testament Scriptures can be Millenarians or Chiliasts. The Holy Scriptures teach that the resurrection of the body will take place at the end of this world, on the Day of Judgment. Then all the dead, the just and the unjust, will be resurrected. For this reason St. Paul also said to Felix in his defense against the Jews: "This I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets; and have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust." Acts 24, 14, 15.

What will follow upon the resurrection of the body? This question I shall now answer in the third place.

* By the *first* resurrection, spoken of in Revelations 20, 6, is understood conversion or regeneration. If Millenarians will only study the whole chapter carefully, they must at once admit that their theories concerning *two* resurrections of the physical dead, are antiscritptural, and, therefore, false and pernicious.

3.

What will follow upon the resurrection of the body, Jesus tells us in our text, when He says: "The hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth: *they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.*"

The resurrection of the body is followed by the Final Judgment. The resurrected bodies will be reunited with the souls, which departed from them when physical death came. Physical death is nothing else than the separation of body and soul. The resurrected bodies will be there where the souls will be: either in heaven or in hell. That is what Jesus means, when He says, that some will be resurrected unto life, and some unto damnation. Those who have done good, says He, shall be resurrected unto life; and those who have done evil, unto damnation.

These words of Jesus have always been a bone of contention in outer Christendom. All those who would be saved by their works, argue that Jesus here expressly teaches that men must save themselves by their own good works; that sinful men cannot be saved by faith alone. But, as every Bible student knows, this is wrong. The whole Bible, both the Old and the New Testament, nowhere teaches that man must, or that he can, save himself by his own good works. The Bible everywhere teaches that sinful man can be saved only through faith in Jesus Christ, the one and only Savior of sinful mankind. Therefore Jesus does not teach at all in our text that those who are resurrected unto life, have merited eternal life by their good works. All that He teaches is this: All those who are resurrected unto eternal life, were in deed and in truth, true believers, true Christians, while they lived upon earth. *By their good works they proved that they were true believers in Him.* Therefore St. Paul wrote to the Roman Christians: "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the Law." Romans 3, 28. And to the Galatian Christians: "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the Law; for by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified." Gal. 2, 16. Yea, even Habakkuk, the prophet of old, wrote by inspiration of God: "The just shall live by his faith." And therefore it was said of

Abraham: "Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness" (Romans 4, 3; Genesis 15, 6).

That the prophets and apostles did not teach anything contrary to the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, is evident. If they had, they could not have been His servants. The fact is that Jesus Himself taught that sinful men are saved by faith in Him, and not by their works. We find many passages to this effect in the Bible. Let me, however, only refer you to the twenty-fifth chapter of St. Matthew, where Jesus tells us what will follow upon the resurrection of the dead on the Day of Judgment. He says that on that great day He will say unto those on His right hand side: "Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." The Lord tells those, who have been placed to His right side, that is, to the true believers in Him, that they *inherit* the kingdom of heaven. What does that mean? Does that mean, that they merited it by their good works? Surely not! *What we inherit, we do not merit.* But Jesus enumerates the good works of those on His right hand side in order to prove that they were true believers in Him, that they loved and willingly served Him while they were in this world. Those, therefore, who, while they were in this world, had true faith in Jesus Christ as their one and only Savior, and proved their faith in Him by good works, will be resurrected unto life everlasting. The unbelievers, on the other hand, who did not serve Him, but did evil works, because they were not true believers in Jesus Christ, will be resurrected unto eternal damnation in hell, for Jesus will say unto them on that great day: "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." *"And these shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal."*

At the last day the resurrected believers in Christ will have glorified bodies, fashioned like unto the glorious body of Jesus Christ. The believers who are upon this earth when the last day is at hand, will not first die physically, but their bodies will be changed into glorious bodies also. All those at the right hand side of the Judge will have glorious bodies. Those on His left hand side will not have glorious, but rather vile bodies.

God grant, for the sake of Jesus Christ, that all of us may truly believe in our dear Savior, and that we may manifest forth our faith in Him by good works, and at the last day be resurrected unto life everlasting. Amen.

Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity.

Acts 5, 27—29.

And when they had brought them, they set them before the Council; and the highpriest asked them, saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? And, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood upon us. Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.

From the Gospel-lesson for this Sunday we learn that the scribes and Pharisees hated Jesus of Nazareth with all their hearts. Why, then, did they hate Him so much? Was Jesus of Nazareth not a good and kind man, and did He not do much good to and for the Jewish people? Indeed, He was a very good man, and He did nothing but good to and for them. Why, then, did the chiefs of the Jews hate Him so intensely?

The chiefs of the Jews hated Jesus of Nazareth so intensely because He would not do what *they* wanted Him to do. Jesus was no respecter of persons. He did not flatter the chiefs of the Jews, nor did He despise the poor and lowly among them. He told all of them the truth, and He upbraided all, who were not upright in their dealings with their fellows and their God. The chiefs of the Jews, with a few exceptions, were miserable hypocrites. Jesus told them to their faces that they were hypocrites, and He called them blind leaders of the blind. He cared not at all for their man-made doctrines; He paid no attention to them, and He taught the common people and all those who would listen to Him that God must be worshiped in spirit and in truth; that all eye-service was an abomination in His sight. He taught them that it was altogether impossible for them to keep the Law of God perfectly, and that therefore a sinner could be saved solely and only through faith in Him, the promised Messiah. For these reasons the chiefs of the Jews hated Him with all their hearts, and they continually tried to arouse ill-feelings against Him. They were continually plotting His destruction. And, as we learn from our text, they did the same thing with the disciples and apostles of Jesus Christ. They tried to rule over their conscience. But the apostles and disciples of Jesus would not permit any man to rule over their conscience. And to this very day, all true Christians, all true Protestants, protest against all man-made doctrines in spiritual matters, and against all human authority in matters

pertaining to conscience. In accordance with our text, and by the gracious assistance of the Holy Spirit, let me now call your devout attention to the indisputable fact,—

That They Only are True Protestants Who, Like the Holy Apostles, Solemnly Protest,

1. *Against all man-made doctrines in spiritual matters, and*
2. *Against all human authority in matters pertaining to conscience.*

1.

St. Luke tells us in our text: "*And when they had brought them, they set them before the Council; and the highpriest asked them, saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? And, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood upon us.*"

The scene described in our text was the city of Jerusalem. After the Lord's suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension, the holy apostles boldly preached Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen Savior of the world in the Temple. The chiefs of the Jews were very much offended at the preaching and teaching of the holy apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ, and they laid hands on them, and put them into the common prison; but during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors, and led them out. The next day the holy apostles were again in the Temple, preaching and teaching the Gospel of salvation. Now the highpriest of the Jews called together the members of the Sanhedrin. After the Sanhedrists had come together the holy apostles were brought before them, and the highpriest, as the chairman of the Sanhedrin, upbraided them for not having obeyed the mandate of the chiefs of the Jews, saying: "*Did we not strailly command you that ye should not teach in this name? And, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood upon us.*"

Mark well, beloved friends, the highpriest, or rather the Sanhedrists, did not forbid the apostles to preach and teach at all; but they forbade them to teach and preach in the name of Jesus Christ, that is, they forbade them to teach and preach the *Gospel of Jesus Christ*. They wanted the holy apostles to understand that they were at liberty to preach and teach the law of Moses and the traditions of the fathers as much and unto whom-

soever they pleased; but that they by no means and under no circumstances preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Sanhedrists *forbade* them to do, what Jesus Himself had *commanded* them to do, for Jesus told them before He ascended into heaven: "Go ye therefore into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature." Mark 16, 15. And again He said unto them: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. And, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." Matt. 28, 19, 20.

What did the holy apostles now do? Did they obey the Sanhedrists? No, indeed, not; for we read in our text: "*Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.*" That was a solemn *protest*. They solemnly protested against substituting *man-made doctrines for the Word of God, especially, for the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ*. They were the *first Protestants* of the Christian era. Woe unto the Christian Church, my beloved fellow-Christians, if the holy apostles had obeyed the Jewish Sanhedrin; for had they obeyed, the Christian Church would have died in its infancy.

What the holy apostles did, all true Christians have done at all times. You well know, that the papists have at all times tried to do what the Sanhedrin tried to do. They have at all times tried to force the Christian people to accept their *man-made, anti-christian* doctrines. And as long as they had the power they even killed those who would not bow to their mandates. The papists have killed many true Christians, who would not and could not substitute man-made doctrines for the Word of God, the Gospel of Jesus Christ.* Papists do not do today, what they did in by-gone centuries. Not because they have changed in sentiment, but because they have lost their power. And it was especially through one man that things have been changed. And this man is hated by the papists every bit as much as Jesus was hated by the chiefs of the Jews. This one man is *Martin Luther*. Yes,

* While on his throne of sacerdotal lies,
The arch-impostor, Satan's rival, sat
Self-deified, and ripened earth for hell:

* See: *Great Leaders and Great Events*, by the Rev. L. Buchheimer, sub, *The French Huguenots*.

Then Luther rose; and liberty and light
Unbarred the soul, and let salvation in.

Like the holy apostles, almost nineteen hundred years ago, so Martin Luther, the great apostle of modern times, four hundred years ago, solemnly protested against the demands of the papists at the Diet at Worms, when they tried their very best to have him desist from teaching and preaching God's Word in its purity and entirety; when they wanted him to substitute the man-made and antichristian doctrines of the Romish church for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Martin Luther would not be, and he was not, muzzled. He much rather would have given his life than desist from preaching and teaching the Bible doctrines, for he himself said: "Rather will I lose life and limb than surrender God's true and clear Word."

They only who, like the holy apostles and Martin Luther, solemnly protest against all man-made doctrines in spiritual matters, are true Protestants. All those who, like the papists and others, submit to man-made doctrines in opposition to the doctrines of God, as they are contained in Holy Writ, are not true Protestants. Measuring, therefore, the Protestantism of many so-called Protestants by this standard, we find that they are not worthy of the name which they bear. The so-called Higher Critics of today, the modern theologians and liberal Christians, are not true Protestants at all, for they hold to, and submit themselves, to man-made doctrines in spiritual matters. Let me give you a few examples, my beloved friends, to substantiate the truthfulness of this statement.

The Word of God teaches that there are three divine persons in the Godhead, but only one God. This doctrine of the Bible many so-called Protestants in our days have deserted because, as they say, such doctrine is contrary to human reason. The Word of God, furthermore, teaches that man is by nature a lost and condemned creature, because he cannot fulfil the divine Law perfectly. This doctrine of the Bible many so-called Protestants in our days have cast overboard because, as they say, such doctrine lowers the status of man. The Word of God teaches, furthermore, that all those, who will not go to Jesus Christ as lost and condemned sinners, admitting their utter incapability of saving themselves, are eternally lost, because without Christ there is no salvation in store for any sinner. This doctrine of the Bible many so-called Protestants of today deny because, so they claim,

by this doctrine man is disgraced. The Word of God, furthermore, teaches that Jesus of Nazareth is in deed and in truth the very Son of the everlasting God, and the Godman Savior of the sinful world. This doctrine of the Bible many so-called Protestants of today reject, claiming that Jesus of Nazareth was a mere man, though a very good and holy man. And, finally, to cite one more example. The Word of God teaches that in the Sacrament of the Altar communicants receive the true body and blood of the Savior in, with, and under the consecrated bread and wine (1 Cor. 10, 16; 11, 27). This doctrine of the Bible many so-called Protestants deny because, so they say, Christ could not give His body and blood to many at the same time. I could cite many more examples to show that many of those who call themselves Protestants are not real Protestants at all, because they do not protest against man-made doctrines, but against the doctrines of God. True Protestants believe whatever God teaches in His Word whether or not they can understand it, because they know that God cannot lie and that with Him nothing is impossible.

True Protestants also solemnly protest against all human authority in matters pertaining to conscience. Of this I shall speak to you in the second place.

2.

When the highpriest said to the holy apostles: "Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? And, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood upon us," St. Peter and the other apostles answered and said: "*We ought to obey God rather than men.*"

The Jewish Sanhedrin had not only the right to judge in church matters, but also in civil matters; it was not only a religious, but also a civil court, and, therefore, it was part of the government. The fact is that the Roman emperors had given the Sanhedrists legal power to sit in judgment upon all matters of government, save this one that they could not execute a death-sentence. But what did the holy apostles do when their government commanded them not to preach and teach in the name of Jesus? When their government interfered with their God-given rights concerning matters of conscience? They simply refused to obey. They would not permit any man or any company of men to stand between them and their God. In matters pertaining to

conscience, the holy apostles would not acknowledge any human authority. They told that august body of men: "*We ought to obey God rather than men.*" They were true Protestants indeed. True Protestants solemnly protest against human authority in all matters of conscience.

Thus also Martin Luther. There was no more law-abiding man in Germany than he, as long as his government did not interfere with his conscience; but when the German emperor, Charles V, tried to compel him to act contrary to his conscience, Luther would not obey. When, therefore, at the Diet, John Eck, the champion of the Pope and the emperor, called upon Luther to recant his teachings, Luther could not, and would not do it. He defended his stand by a lengthy speech in Latin and German. When, finally, he was commanded by the emperor to give a "simple, round answer, that had neither horns nor claws," Luther gave this answer: "Since Your Imperial Majesty and Your Excellences require of me a direct and simple answer, I will give it. To the Pope and councils I cannot submit my faith, for it is clear that they have erred and contradicted one another. Therefore, unless I am convinced by proofs from Holy Scripture or by sound reasons, and my judgment by this means is commanded by God's Word, I cannot and will not retract anything; for a Christian cannot safely go contrary to his conscience." And, glancing over the august assembly, on whose will his life hung, he added in deep solemnity, "*Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise. God help me! Amen.*"

Luther knew only *one* authority to which man is bound to subject his conscience, namely, the Word of God. And Luther's stand is the true stand. All true Protestants are like Luther in this respect: they will not permit any human authority to dominate over their conscience. In matters of conscience no man or any body of men has any right to dictate. For this reason the Constitution of our beloved fatherland grants freedom of conscience to everybody, and for this reason the Rev. Dr. Odell said to some zealots during the late World War, when they tried to have him do something contrary to his conscience, and when they threatened him with punishment: "Since when and by whose authority have prophets and apostles surrendered their spiritual functions into the keeping of rulers and cabinets?" And there were many thousands of American citizens who did not submit, and will never submit, to human authority in matters of con-

science. And such only are worthy to be called Protestants and Americans, for all those, who subject their conscience to human authority are neither true Protestants, nor true Americans. Whenever true Protestants are approached by anyone to do anything against their conscience, they will flatly refuse to do so, and they will say with St. Peter and all the other apostles: *"We ought to obey God rather than men."* And with Martin Luther: *"A Christian cannot safely go contrary to his conscience. Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise. God help me!"* Had the holy apostles failed to uphold the divine right of conscience before the Jewish Sanhedrin, and had Luther failed to uphold it before the Diet at Worms, then, beloved friends, we would not now be enjoying religious and civil liberty, but we would rather be under the thumb of the pope at Rome. Yes, I believe that it is true what great men have said that, if Luther had not stood firm for God's truth at the Diet at Worms, the American Declaration of Independence never would have been written. When Luther stood before the Diet at Worms, unmovable, recanting and retracting nothing, liberty, — civil and religious liberty, — took the place of tyranny, tyranny over the soul and body of man. Let us never forget the heroic stand Luther took four hundred years ago, let us never forget, "that it was chiefly through his marvelous qualities, word, and work that the towering dominion of the papacy was humbled and broken forever; that prophets and apostles were released from their prisons once more to preach and prophesy to men; that the Church of early times was restored to the bereaved world; that human mind was set free to read and follow God's Word for itself; that the masses of neglected and downtrodden humanity were made into populations of live and thinking beings; and that the nations of the earth have become repossessed of the 'inalienable rights' of 'life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness'" (Seiss).

Yes, beloved friends and fellow-Christians, let us rejoice and thank God with all our heart that the holy apostles, Luther, and the fathers of our country stood firm in turbulent days, and that through them God gave us His Word in its entirety and purity, and civil and religious liberty. So help us God, for Christ's sake! Amen.

Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity.

Matt. 22, 34—46.

But when the Pharisees had heard that He had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together. Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked Him a question, tempting Him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the Law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God, with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets. While the Pharisees were gathered together Jesus asked them, What think ye of Christ? Whose son is He? They say unto Him, The Son of David. He saith unto them, How, then, doth David in spirit call Him Lord, saying, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit Thou on My right hand till I make Thine enemies Thy foodstool? If David, then, call Him Lord, how is He his Son? And no man was able to answer Him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask Him any more questions.

Some one has said: "If Jesus had spoken His full mind on many important questions, they (Jews) would not have waited three years, or three days even, to crucify Him." Indeed, the most absurd assertion that can be made! Every one who has read the New Testament knows that Jesus always spoke His full mind on all important questions. He always spoke the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Because He spoke His full mind on all important questions, He had so many enemies.

His most bitter enemies were the Pharisees, the scribes, or lawyers, and the Sadducees. They were continually seeking and plotting His destruction. Therefore they considered it to be their chief business to arouse and incite popular hatred against Him. They hoped to attain the end in view by entangling Him in all kinds of disputes. They were foolish enough to think that they would be able to entangle Him in His talk. Indeed, "professing themselves to be wise, they became fools" (Rom. 1, 22). This is evident from our text.

The chapter of which our text is a part tells us of three different attempts of Jesus' enemies to entangle Him in His talk. We read in verses 15—22: "Then went the Pharisees and took counsel how they might entangle Him in His talk. And they sent out unto Him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, Master, we know that Thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest Thou for any man; for Thou regardest

not the person of men. Tell us therefore, What thinkest Thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not. But Jesus perceived their wickedness and said, Why tempt ye Me, ye hypocrites? Show Me the tribute-money. And they brought unto Him a penny. And He saith unto them, Whose is the image and super-scription? They say unto Him, Caesar's. Then saith He unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's. When they had heard these words, they marveled, and left Him, and went their way." Then the Sadducees disputed with Him concerning the resurrection of the dead. They denied the doctrine of the resurrection, but Jesus told them: "Have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." *"But when the Pharisees,"* so the evangelist proceeds in our text, *"had heard that He had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together."* It was their last attempt to entangle Jesus in His talk. Jesus gave them a crushing defeat, for at the close of our text we read: *"And no man was able to answer Him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask Him any more questions."* It was the last dispute of the blessed Savior with His enemies. Let us, then, by the assistance of the Holy Spirit, and in accordance with our text, now consider:—

The Last Dispute of Our Savior With the Pharisees on the Two Important Questions:

1. *"Which is the great commandment in the Law?"*
2. *"What think ye of Christ? Whose son is He?"*

1.

The Pharisees and scribes were the teachers of the Jewish nation. All the scribes, or lawyers, were Pharisees, but not all Pharisees were scribes. Jesus Himself said to the people and to His disciples: "The scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat." But they did not only teach the *commandments of God* given through Moses, but also the *commandments of men*. Not less than 613 distinct commandments were taught by them. They disputed very much among themselves over the question, Which is the great, the most important commandment in the Law? It was quite natural that there was a diversity of opinion concerning this question among the Jews. Harmony of opinion, perhaps was only

found with the scribes, the learned among the Pharisees. They at least had united upon this question in opposition to Jesus. "They were gathered together" for no other reason than to defend *one* opinion against the Savior's. It may well be supposed that the most learned among them was chosen as their spokesman. The evangelist does not give the name, but only says: "*But when the Pharisees had heard that He had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together. Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked Him a question, tempting Him, and saying, Master, Which is the great commandment in the Law?*" The self-conceited clique imagined that Jesus could not give the correct answer to the question asked. They argued that the unlettered Jesus of Nazareth, the carpenter's son, who had never taken a course in the Jewish college at Jerusalem, could not know what only could be known to the most learned among their nation. They were persuaded that Jesus could not silence them, as He had silenced the Sadducees. But they were very much mistaken, for we read in our text: "*Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.*" What did the learned lawyer have to say about Jesus' answer? St. Matthew does not tell us, but St. Mark says that he answered and said to Him: "Well, Master, Thou hast said the truth; for there is one God; and there is none other but He; and to love Him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbor as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." Mark 12, 32. 33. And the rest had nothing whatever to say, they were as silent as the dead. The unexpected had happened: they had not silenced Him whom they called the carpenter's son of Nazareth, but He silenced the doctors of the Law.

But, my friends, the Savior was not seeking His own glory — He was seeking the salvation of His enemies. They were a self-conceited, self-complacent, self-righteous lot. They fancied that they had fulfilled the commandments of God perfectly, and therefore they trusted in themselves and despised others. They thanked God that they were not like other men, transgressors of the Law. The dear Savior wished to convince them of their sinfulness, so that they might repent of their sins and be saved; but His efforts

were in vain. Because they did not bow their knees to a graven image, and did not call upon the name of God at Mount Gerizim, but at Jerusalem, and outwardly conformed their actions to the Law, they believed that they were members of God's kingdom. Oh, poor, deluded Pharisees!

The Jewish historian Josephus tells us that there were about 6,000 Pharisees in the time of our Savior. Of course, he refers only to those who belonged to the *sect* of the *Pharisees*. In reality there were by far more. The Jews, in general, were Pharisees *in spirit*. They were a self-righteous and self-satisfied people. They, as a rule, trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised other nations.

The Pharisees have not become extinct to this very day. The world is full of them, and they are plentiful in outer Christendom, even if they do not "make broad their phylacteries," and do not "enlarge the borders of their garments," as the Pharisees of old were accustomed to do. Every unconverted person is a Pharisee in spirit. And, alas! how many so-called Christians are dominated by the same spirit! How many will say: "We are not such great sinners that we should not be saved; we are not as bad as many others; we go to church, and we pay our church-dues; we do good to our fellow-men; we do not swear, cheat, steal, kill, or commit adultery; we lead an honorable life,—why, then, should we not be saved?" That is Pharisaism pure and simple, and reminds one of the self-complacent words of Joseph's brothers, who said: "We are all one man's sons, we are *true* men." Gen. 42, 11. Joseph knew how true they had been in their dealings with him. If they had been such true and good men, they would not have sold him into slavery. Just so God knows how good and true those people are "who trust in themselves and despise others."

How is it with you, my friend? Are you a self-righteous and self-satisfied Pharisee? Do you think that you have fulfilled the commandments of God? Do you believe that you therefore deserve to be eternally saved? Do you trust in your own goodness, piety, and righteousness? If you do, then you are a Pharisee, then you are building your hope of salvation on self-deception; for St. John says by divine inspiration: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." 1 John 1, 8. You most assuredly cannot *truthfully* say that you are without sin, that you never have transgressed the commandments of God in thought, word, and deed. Would you gainsay God?

God says of all men: "They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one." Ps. 14, 3. And again He says: "There is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good and sinneth not." Eccl. 7, 20. And again: "Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this Law to do them." Deut. 27, 26. "Whosoever shall keep the whole Law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." Jas. 2, 10.

If you acknowledge that you are a sinner, if you are troubled on account of your sins, and if you ask, What must I, a sinner, do to be saved? then the Gospel tells you: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Acts 16, 31. For this very reason the question is of vital importance to you which Jesus asks in our text: "*What think ye of Christ? Whose son is He?*"

2.

As long as a man has no right knowledge of the damnable-ness of his sins, so long he is not concerned about the question, "*What think ye of Christ? Whose son is He?*" This is evident from our text. The Pharisees and scribes had no right knowledge of their sinfulness; they trusted in themselves and despised others, and therefore had no regard for Jesus Christ. But as no one can be eternally saved without having a right knowledge of Jesus Christ, the Savior asked them the question: "*What think ye of Christ? Whose son is He?*" What did they answer? They answered, "*The Son of David.*" That was all they knew, and cared to know, about Him. Of course, they were familiar with the letter of the prophecies, but not with the essential, spiritual meaning of them. They believed Him to be a mere man like themselves, who came from David "according to the flesh." They admitted that He was a great prophet, and they called Him "Lord" and "Master," but they did not believe that He was the very Son of God, begotten of the Father from eternity. Jesus wanted to convince them of His *divine sonship*, and for that reason He asked them, "*How, then, doth David in spirit call Him Lord, saying, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit Thou on My right hand till I make Thine enemies Thy footstool? If David, then, call Him Lord, how is He his son?*" Indeed, a fine argumentation! He tells them that David never would have called the Messiah his *Lord* if He had been only one of his descendants "according to the flesh." "It is obvious," the Savior wishes to say, "that no man ever speaks of any one of his descendants who may appear in the world many centuries after his own death as being his *Lord*, his

Superior, his Sovereign. But, continues Christ, David, His remote ancestor, and a mighty and independent monarch himself, who acknowledged no Lord but God, nevertheless, in the first verse of Ps. 110, styles his descendant, the Messiah, his *Lord*, thereby confessing that his descendant is really his Master and Sovereign. But if the Messiah did not already exist, how do you explain this apparently meaningless language, that a royal ancestor should acknowledge one of his distant descendants as his superior, nay, employ obviously the language of adoration? For David applied the term 'Lord' to one who does not sit *at God's feet* as an inferior, but *at His side* as the coequal in glory." *

The Pharisees could not refute Christ's arguments, and yet, they would not acknowledge Him to be the Son of God. Christ's efforts to save them were in vain. They would not be saved through Him. Of course, He was the Savior they *needed*, but He was not the Savior they *wanted*. And how very similar to the Pharisees were the Jews in general! They did not realize the damnable-ness of their sins, and therefore not the necessity of such a Savior as Jesus was. They believed, as they had been taught by the Pharisees and scribes, that Jesus Christ was nothing more than a human being, and, at most, a great prophet. They would not believe, that he was the Godman, the divine Savior of the world. When Jesus asked His disciples, saying, "Whom do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" they said, "Some say that Thou art John the Baptist; some, Elias; and others, Jeremias or one of the prophets." Matt. 16, 13, 14.

And if we ask the question today: "*What think ye of Christ? Whose son is He?*" the vast majority of people give the very same answer. Not only outside the Church, but in outer Christendom itself the answer given by many preachers and laymen to this question is, "Jesus Christ was the son of David, a mere man, though a man whose example of godliness and holiness should indeed be copied and followed by all men, a man who deserves the respect of the world, a man who was truly good, pious, and great!" They do not believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the Godman and Savior of the world. The doctrine of the Bible that Jesus Christ has redeemed the sinful world through His sufferings and death upon the cross is termed the "blood-theology of a dark age," which must be eliminated. Like the Pharisees of

* Lutheran Commentary, Vol. II, p. 285.

old, most people have no right knowledge of the Law, and consequently no right knowledge of their sins. Such being the case, they imagine that they can save themselves, and that they are not in need of Jesus; they trust in themselves, and therefore they despise the one and only Savior, Jesus Christ. "Professing themselves to be wise, they become fools" (Rom. 1, 22).

When Jesus asked His disciples: "Whom do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" they answered: "Some say that Thou art John the Baptist; some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets." Then He asked them: "But whom say ye that I am?" Then Simon Peter, the spokesman of the disciples, answered: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." The disciples of Jesus had a right knowledge of the Law; they were convinced that they could not keep it perfectly, and that they deserved God's wrath, death, and damnation, and that they were in need of a Savior, "the Son of the living God." They believed that Jesus of Nazareth was the one and only Savior, and therefore they joyfully confessed, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." They meant to say: "We believe that Thou art not only the promised Messiah, our Deliverer from sin and death, but also the eternal and only-begotten Son of God, our only Lord and King." And they were correct. Jesus of Nazareth did save them, as He saves all those who truly believe in Him as their Savior.

God grant that we may truly believe in Him as in our one and only Savior, and be eternally saved! Amen.

Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity.

John 20, 22b. 23.

He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost; whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained.

This Sunday's Gospel-lesson tells us that Jesus of Nazareth healed a man sick of the palsy, and that He also forgave him his sins. Certain scribes, however, who heard Jesus say to the sick man: "Son be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee," said within themselves: "This man blasphemeth." Mark and Luke tell us that they also said within themselves: "Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God only?" Jesus knowing their thoughts, said unto them: "Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts? For whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk?" And in order to prove to them that He had authority and power to forgive sins, He said to the sick man: "Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house." And what happened? The Evangelist St. Matthew tells us: "And he arose, and departed to his house." The scribes now, indeed, should have admitted that Jesus had power to forgive sins, but they did not. The people, however, were fully convinced that He had such power, and they glorified God.

It is, indeed, true, beloved friends, that by His *own power* God alone can forgive sins. Yea, those scribes did not even want to deny that God forgives sins *through men*, for they knew very well that God always had forgiven the sins of the Jewish people through His holy prophets, and, especially, through the highpriest on the Day of Atonement. But as they did not believe that Jesus of Nazareth was a prophet of God, they would not admit that He could forgive sins, nor that He was the true Messiah, God's Son, who had become man. They had hardened their hearts against Jesus. The people, however, did not doubt in the least that Jesus, who had the power to heal the sick man by a word of His mouth, also had power to forgive sins, and for this reason they glorified God.

What those people believed, we also believe. No one who calls himself a Christian would deny that *Jesus* has the power to forgive sins; but very many do deny that His *disciples*, that is, the Christians, who constitute His Church, have power to remit

and retain sins. This power is known among us as the *Office of the Keys*. To the question: "What is the Office of the Keys?" our Small Catechism gives this answer: "It is the peculiar* church power which Christ has given to His Church on earth to forgive the sins of the penitent sinners unto them, but retain the sins of the impenitent, as long as they do not repent." That this answer is correct, we see from our text. In accordance with the same, and by the assistance of the Holy Spirit, let me now call your devout attention to:—

The Office of the Keys.

Let me show,

1. *That Christ gave the Office of the Keys to His Church on earth and, more particularly, to every local congregation, and*
2. *In what manner Christian congregations should exercise the public administration of the Office of the Keys.*

1.

It was on the evening of the day of His glorious resurrection that Jesus appeared to a number of His disciples, who had assembled themselves behind locked doors in a house in the city of Jerusalem, because they were afraid that the ungodly Jews might do with them, what they had done with Jesus. While they were yet discussing the great events which had taken place during the last few days, Jesus appeared to them. As none of them had opened the locked door to leave Him in, and as He appeared unto them with a glorified body, they became affrighted, thinking that they were seeing a ghost (Luke 24, 37). But Jesus greeted them, saying: "Peace be unto you!" Then He showed them His hands, where the marks of the nails were still visible, and His side, where the soldier's lance-head had left a deep gash. This demonstration convinced the disciples of His resurrection, and they were glad that they actually saw the Lord. Then Jesus, after He had again greeted them with the same greeting, breathed upon them and said unto them: "*Receive ye the Holy Ghost; whose-*

* It is called *peculiar* church power, because it is a spiritual power which Christ has given only to His Church or the Christians. To the civil government He also has given a peculiar or special power, namely, the power to execute capital punishment upon a criminal.

which were given, they are committed unto them, and whatever they were given, they are retained." When Jesus had bestowed the Office of the Keys, that is, the full authority over them, the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven.

To whom, then, did Jesus bestow the Christ gave the Office of the Keys? The answer given to this question is really given by ourselves who carefully read the words of our text. For they are very plain and simple. According to our text, Jesus gave the Office of the Keys to *those upon whom He bestowed, and said, "Whosoever thou shalt bind on earth, they shall be bound in Heaven; and whosoever thou shalt loose on earth, they shall be loosed in Heaven."* These were the Disciples. To His Disciples, however, not only He gave the authority but all *those* who were then present and believed in Him at the time. We know that not only the apostles, with the exception of Thomas, were there, but also other disciples (Luke 24:34). And Jesus gave the Office of the Keys to all who believe in Him, to all true Christians, as he often recalls in His Church as such, but all believers in Jesus Christ comprise His Church. For the same our Great Canadian says of the Office of the Keys that it is a greater or general power which Christ has given to His Church on earth and, more particularly, to every local congregation.

This local exercise is derived by every man. All Christians exercise this power. There all teach that the forgiveness of sins cannot be obtained through men, that it can be obtained only immediately, that is, directly from God.

The Roman Catholic Church denies and denies the Bible doctrine that the Office of the Keys was given by Christ to His Church on earth and, more particularly, to every local congregation. "The Romanists declare that Christ gave the power to bind and to loose to His Peter and that Peter left it to the line of Rome. He the Pope claims that he alone has the keys of Heaven, and not again and those whom, whom he chooses and to whom he pleases."

It is, indeed, very solemn truth, that Christ gave the Office of the Keys to the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, to His Church on earth and, more particularly, to every local congregation. "I will give unto thee the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in Heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in Heaven." Matt. 18:18. And Jesus did give the Office of the Keys to the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, to His Church on earth and to all His churches, the life and to all of

them: "*Receive ye the Holy Ghost; whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained.*"

The Anglican or Episcopal Church teaches that the Office of the Keys was not given "to a single person, but to the clergy as a distinct class from the laity." This is what is generally called the doctrine of Apostolic Succession, teaching, "that Christ gave the Office of the Keys to the apostles and the apostles transmitted it to the bishops ordained by them as their successors, and these again to their successors up to the present time."

It is true, beloved friends, that Christ gave the Office of the Keys or the keys of the kingdom of heaven, to His apostles, but the Bible nowhere states that He gave it to them *alone*; on the contrary, we learn from the Bible itself, that Jesus gave the Office of the Keys to all of His disciples, to all true Christians, to His Church on earth and, more particularly, to every *local congregation*. This we learn from these words of Jesus: "If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone; if he shall hear thee, then thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church. But if he shall neglect to hear the church,* let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father which is in heaven. For where *two or three* are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them." Matt. 18, 15—20. From these words of Jesus it is evident that He has given the Office of the Keys to all Christians, to His Church on earth and, more particularly, to every Christian congregation, though it be ever so small.

In what manner should Christian congregations exercise the *public* administration of the Office of the Keys? This question I shall now answer in the second place.

* By *church* here the local congregation is meant, for it would be impossible to tell the whole Christian Church on earth.

According to the doctrine of the Bible Jesus Christ gave the Office of the Keys or the keys of the kingdom of heaven, to all true believers in Him, to His Church on earth and, more particularly, to every local congregation. Many deny that this is true, but their denial does not and cannot do away with the undeniable fact, that the *Bible* teaches it. All Bible passages which I have quoted are very clear and emphatic. No one who really knows the Bible, will deny that the Bible teaches that Christ has given the Office of the Keys to His Church on earth and, more particularly, to every local congregation. But, of course, the Bible does not teach that every *individual* Christian should exercise the administration of the Office of the Keys *publicly*.

God is not a God of disorder and confusion, but a God of order. He wants all things to be done decently and orderly (1 Cor. 14, 40). What disorder and confusion there would be in a congregation, if every member wanted to exercise the administration of the Office of the Keys in public, that is, if every member would want to preach, teach, remit and retain sins, and administer the Holy Sacraments! Therefore God at all times called certain men to perform the functions of the Office of the Keys publicly. During the time of the Old Testament He called these men *immediately*, that is, directly; and in the time of the New Testament He calls them *mediately*, that is, through the congregation. Therefore St. Paul told the pastors of the congregation in Ephesus: "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the Church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood." Acts 20, 28. Though the *congregation* in Ephesus had chosen and called those men as their pastors, the apostle says that the *Holy Ghost* had made them overseers or pastors of the whole flock, that is, the whole congregation. ✓ The Christian congregations, according to God's will, must choose and call special ministers of the Gospel, who are in their name to perform the functions of the Office of the Keys publicly. And these men, who have been called by the Christian congregation, are ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God (1 Cor. 4, 1); and they only should exercise the administration of the Office of the Keys in public, only cases of necessity being excepted. In cases of necessity any Christian can and should, for instance, baptize a dying child which has not been baptized as yet. Yes, privately every Chris-

tian can and should teach and absolve, but publicly only the called ministers of the Gospel should do it.

It is in the Church as it is in our Republic. As in our Republic all citizens have equal rights, so in the Church all believers are equal in Christ; they all possess the same treasures, the same privileges, and the same rights. Every true believer has Christ, and with Him all the spiritual treasures and rights, and yet *publicly* only those Christians should perform the functions of the Office of the Keys, unto whom the church or congregation has transmitted this special authority through the call. Because in our Republic *all* citizens have equal rights, yet no individual citizen has the right to perform the functions of a public office, unless he is elected to it by his fellow-citizens. If you would say, I am a citizen of the United States of America and, therefore, I have the right to act as president, people would consider you insane, for all people know that he only can act as president who has been chosen to that great office by the citizens of our country. As a private citizen our President has no more rights than you and I have; but as the highest official of our country he has the authority and power, to perform the functions of the presidential office.

So in the church or congregation. Only those men should perform the functions of the Office of the Keys publicly, that is, only those men should teach, preach, remit and retain sins, and administer the Holy Sacraments in public who have been called by a church or congregation. For this reason Dr. Luther said that, if he could convert the whole world, yet if he had no call to do it, he would have to leave it undone. God does not want any man to perform the functions of the Office of the Keys publicly, unless he is chosen and called to do so by a Christian church or congregation.

When our President performs the functions of his office as they are laid down for him by the Federal Constitution and laws, then his pronouncements and acts are valid, and he has the whole power of our Nation at his command to back him up, but if he acts contrary to the Federal Constitution and laws, then, beloved friends, his pronouncements and acts are null and void, and he can and should be impeached and removed from office.*

* The President, Vice-President, and all Civil officers of the United States, shall be removed from office on *impeachment* for

Thus it is also with the called ministers of Jesus Christ, the stewards of the mysteries of God. If they teach, preach, absolve, ban, and administer the Holy Sacraments in accordance with the instructions which the Lord Himself has laid down for them in His Word, then their preachments and acts are valid and certain, just as valid and certain as if God Himself had spoken and acted, for then they have the power of the almighty God to back them up. But, on the other hand, if they teach, preach, and speak their own ideas and notions, as so many so-called ministers of the Gospel do; or, when they pronounce absolution to the impenitent sinner and ban the penitent sinner, the true Christian, as the Pope, for instance, does; or, when they do not administer the Holy Sacraments according to Christ's institution, then all their pronouncements, preachments, and acts are null and void in God's sight, and they should be removed from the office by the congregation which called them. The so-called liberal preachers, who deny the fundamental doctrines of the Bible, have no business whatever in a Christian church. If they do not believe the doctrines of the church or congregation that called them, they should be honest enough to resign. But if they are not honest enough to do that,—and as a rule they are not,—then the church or congregation should remove them from office. This holds good also of professors at Christian colleges and universities, when they teach unchristian and unscriptural doctrines.*

God grant that we may always use the Office of the Keys as He wants it used, then, beloved friends, His divine blessings will not be wanting! Amen.

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and conviction of treason, bribery or other high crimes and misdemeanors.—Constitution of the U. S. Art. II, 4.

* We do not interfere with freedom of conscience or with freedom of speech when we refuse to pay a man for teaching things that we think are injurious, especially to the young. Christians are required to build their own colleges in which to teach Christianity; why should not atheists be required to build their own colleges in which to teach atheism? And the same question can be applied to agnosticism, or to any other kind of teaching objectionable to the taxpayers. If the scientists contend that they are simply teaching a scientific interpretation of the Bible, the same question arises: Why should a few people demand pay from the public for teaching a scientific interpretation of the Bible when teachers in public institutions are not permitted to teach the orthodox interpretation of Bible? By what logic can the minority demand privileges that are denied to the majority? —William Jennings Bryan, in *Seven Questions in Dispute*, p. 156, 157.

Twentieth Sunday after Trinity.

1 Cor. 11, 23—29.

For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus, the same night in which He was betrayed, took bread; and when He had given thanks, He brake it and said, Take, eat; this is My body, which is broken for you; this do in remembrance of Me. After the same manner also He took the cup, when He had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in My blood; this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of Me. For as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till He come. Wherefore, whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

The kingdom of God our dear Savior pictures to us in His Parable of the Marriage Feast, which is the Gospel-lesson for this Sunday. Jesus says, that a king made a marriage for his son. According to Oriental custom the guests had been invited long before the marriage took place. When the king had prepared the wedding-feast, he sent out his servants to tell the bidden ones: "Behold, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready; come unto the marriage." But what did they do? They refused to come; yea, some even entreated the king's servants despitefully, and killed them. When the king heard what had been done, he became very angry, and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed the murderers and burned up their city.

But the king had prepared the wedding-feast, and he wanted guests at his table. So he sent out other servants with the instruction, to invite all whom they could possibly find, both good and bad. And they did as the king had commanded them to do, and the wedding was furnished with guests. On such occasions Oriental kings always provided their guests with a wedding-garment, which they were supposed to wear at the festive tables. When the king came into the dining room to see his guests, he saw one who had neglected to put on the wedding-garment; perhaps, he had neglected it purposely, in order to insult the gracious king. The king gave orders to his servants, to take that man and put him out into outer darkness. And the servants did as they were bidden.

By this parable Jesus wishes to teach that God has prepared a great salvation for all sinners. This God did through the redemption which was wrought by His only-begotten Son. When Jesus Christ had suffered and died on the cross, the gracious redemption of the whole sinner-world was accomplished for all times to come. The Lord sent forth His apostles and other ministers of the Gospel, — and He does it to this very day, — to preach the good news to all sinful men, and to invite them, to come. Yes, He even told them through His ministers that they should come just as they were; that He had provided for every one of them a precious wedding-garment; that all they needed to do was to put it on and sit down at the table of the gracious God. This wedding-garment is the robe of Christ's righteousness, which is put on through faith in Jesus Christ. And all who appear in this robe have forgiveness of their sins.

In order to make every believer in Him certain of the forgiveness of his sins, life, and salvation, Jesus instituted His Supper or the Sacrament of the Altar. To every one who receives this holy Sacrament, the Lord wishes to seal the forgiveness of his sins by giving him His true body and blood in, with, and under the consecrated bread and wine in a sacramental manner. That this is true, we learn from our text. In accordance with the same, and by the assistance of the Holy Spirit, let me now direct your devout attention to:—

The Doctrine of Holy Scripture Concerning the Lord's Supper.
Hear what it teaches,

1. *Of the essence;*
2. *Of the benefit, and*
3. *Of the salutary use of the Lord's Supper.*

1.

As is well known to every one of you, beloved friends, all Christian churches in the world celebrate the Lord's Supper; but not all of them celebrate it as Christ wants it to be celebrated. The reason for this sad fact is, because not all believe, teach, and confess the Bible-doctrine of the Sacrament of the Altar or the Lord's Supper.

The Reformed or Calvinistic churches believe, teach, and confess that the communicants receive only bread and wine or

grape juice,* and not the body and blood of Jesus Christ with their mouths; that the bread represents Christ's body, and the wine or grape juice represents Christ's blood. This they teach because they believe that Jesus Christ cannot give His body and blood to so many communicants at one time; yes, they teach that Jesus Christ is omnipresent only according to His divine nature and not according to His human nature. In reality they believe and teach a divine and a human Christ. That, however, is wrong, for there is but *one* Jesus Christ.

The Roman Catholic Church believes, teaches, and confesses, that in the Sacrament nothing but Christ's body and blood are present, that as soon as the priest consecrates the elements, that is, bread and wine, these are changed into the body and blood of Christ.** In the Roman Catholic Church, furthermore, the laity receives the Lord's Supper in one kind only, the priest drinking the wine for all of them.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church believes, teaches, and confesses, that Christ, in a sacramental manner, gives His true body and blood in, with, and under the consecrated bread and wine, that is, that the earthly elements, bread and wine, and the heavenly gifts, Christ's body and blood, are at the same time taken with the mouth of the body, but the former in a natural, the latter in a supernatural manner.

Now the question arises, Which of these doctrines is the correct one? This question can be answered only by the Bible itself. What, then, does the Bible teach concerning the *essence* of the Sacrament of the Altar or the Lord's Supper?

The Bible plainly teaches, that Christ gives His true body and blood to the communicants in, with, and under the consecrated bread and wine, for thus we read in our text: "*The Lord Jesus, the same night in which He was betrayed, took bread; and*

* Most of the Reformed or Calvinistic churches in our country use grape juice instead of wine. That is contrary to Christ's institution, for He used wine when He instituted His Supper. Joseph Bingham, the well-known archaeologist, says that the apostolic Christians always used *wine*. He writes: "The other part of the Sacrament was always wine, and that taken also out of the oblations of the people."

** The false doctrine of changing, called *transubstantiation*, was proclaimed by the Fourth Lateran Council in the year 1215. The cup is refused to the laity since the year 1415, by order of the Council of Constance.

when He had given thanks, He brake it and said, *Take, eat; this is My body, which is broken*" or, as the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke say, given, "*for you; this do in remembrance of Me. After the same manner also He took the cup, when He had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in My blood; this do ye as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of Me. For as often* as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till He come. Wherefore, whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.*"

From these words of our text we clearly see that Jesus does not say that the bread and the wine *represent* His body and His blood, so that the communicants receive *only bread and wine*; nor does He say that the bread and wine are *changed* into His body and blood, so that the communicants receive *only His body and blood*, and no bread and no wine. No, Jesus teaches that the communicants receive His body and blood in, with, and under the bread and wine in a sacramental manner. That is what the Bible teaches concerning the *essence* of this holy Sacrament. And this doctrine is believed, taught, and confessed by our dear Evangelical Lutheran Church.

In the second place let me show you what the Bible teaches concerning the *benefit* of this holy Sacrament.

2.

The Sacrament of the Altar or the Lord's Supper is the testament of our Lord Jesus Christ for His Church, for His Christians. Only for Christians did the Lord institute this holy Sacrament. A testament is of benefit only to those for whom it was made.

Now, what is the *benefit* of the Lord's Supper for believing Christians? This question also is of far-reaching importance.

* The Bible does not say how often a Christian should partake of the Lord's Supper, but by using the term "as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup," it teaches that a Christian should commune *frequently*. Luther says, at least four times a year.

The Reformed or Calvinistic churches teach, that the Lord's Supper has only this benefit that Christians remember, or are reminded of, the Lord's death.

The Roman Catholic Church teaches concerning the benefit of this Sacrament, that only remission for the lesser sins is obtained; that the chief benefit consists in adoring the elevated host, and that the priest sacrifices Christ in an unbloody manner,*

The Evangelical Lutheran Church teaches that the benefit of this holy Sacrament consists chiefly in the strengthening of faith in the forgiveness of sin, and the furtherance in holiness of life.

Which doctrine is correct? This question, again, can be answered only by the Bible itself. What does the Bible teach concerning the *benefit* of the Lord's Supper?

St. Paul does not expressly tell us in our text, but the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell us, for they say that Christ said to His disciples, when He distributed the holy Sacrament unto them: "Take, eat; this is My body, which is given for you. Take, drink ye all of it, this is the new testament in My blood, which is shed for you for the *remission of sins*." Therefore Luther, in his Small Catechism asks the question: "What is the benefit of such eating and drinking?" and he gives this answer: "That is shown us by these words, 'Given, and shed for you for the remission of sins'; namely, that in the Sacrament forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation are given us through these words. For where there is forgiveness of sin, there is also life and salvation." If we receive forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation by the right use of the holy Sacrament, then, of course, we also receive strengthening of faith and furtherance in holiness of life.

Though all communicants receive the true body and blood of Jesus Christ in, with, and under the consecrated bread and wine, wherever the holy Sacrament is rightly administered, that is, administered according to Christ's institution, yet those only receive the *benefit*, forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation, who use it in a *salutary* manner. Of this I shall speak to you finally.

* Cardinal Gibbons: "If the wounds of the martyrs plead so eloquently for us, how much more eloquently is the *blood of Christ shed daily upon our altars*?" According to these words of the cardinal it is not an unbloody sacrifice after all. Romanists only use the term *unbloody sacrifice* in order to deceive Protestants.

3.

Concerning the salutary use of the Lord's Supper, the Reformed or Calvinistic churches teach, that, as the communicants receive only bread and wine with their mouths, no one could be harmed in his soul by eating and drinking this Sacrament without faith.

The Roman Catholic Church teaches, that every one who receives the Lord's Supper receives the benefit of the same, even though he be an unbeliever.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church teaches, that only those communicants receive the benefit of this holy Sacrament, who have faith in the words of Jesus: "Given, and shed for you for the remission of sins," and that, therefore, an unbeliever or hypocrite never receives the benefit: forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation, but that he rather eats and drinks damnation unto himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

Which doctrine is correct? This question, again, can be correctly answered only by the Bible. What, then, does the Bible teach concerning the *salutary use* of this Sacrament?

St. Paul teaches in our text: "*Wherefore,*" that is, because the Lord gives His body and blood in, with, and under the consecrated bread and wine, "*whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.*"

No one who reads or hears these solemn words of the Apostle St. Paul, can truthfully say that everyone who receives the Lord's Supper receives the benefit of the same. If such were the case the holy apostle would not have warned all communicants against an *unworthy* use of the Sacrament. He does not, however, simply say, Be careful when you attend the Lord's Table so that you will be benefited by it; no, he says that, if you do not receive the Sacrament worthily, you eat and drink *damnation* to yourself. Every communicant who does not receive the Sacrament worthily, that is, who does not believe the words of Christ: "*Given, and shed for you for the remission of sins,*" receives damnation to himself. That is terrible! And in order to avoid such terrible sin, St. Paul admonishes: "*Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup.*" Every commu-

nicant should prove himself whether or not he truly believes in the Savior and in His words: "Given, and shed for you for the remission of sins." He who believes in Jesus as in his Savior and in these words of Jesus, "Given, and shed for you for the remission of sins," is worthy, that is, well prepared to receive the holy Sacrament for his benefit; but he who does not believe, receives it to his damnation. For this reason Luther says in his Small Catechism: "He is worthy and well prepared who has faith in these words, 'Given, and shed for you for the remission of sins'; but he that does not believe these words, or doubts, is unworthy and unprepared; for the words, 'For you,' require all hearts to believe." True worthiness, therefore, consists only and solely in faith in these words: "Given, and shed for you for the remission of sins." This is what the Holy Scriptures teach concerning the *salutary use* of this holy Sacrament. Every teaching which is contrary to this teaching of the Bible is wrong and harmful. I wish to emphasize the fact that only those communicants receive the benefit of the holy Sacrament, who approach the Lord's Table as believing Christians, who have faith in the words of Christ: "Given, and shed for you for the remission of sins." All others receive the holy Sacrament unto their damnation.

In order that everyone who wishes to approach the Table of the Lord, may truly examine himself, our dear Evangelical Lutheran Church does not only insist upon a thorough instruction of all communicants in the chief parts of the Christian doctrine, but it also requires every communicant to examine himself before he goes to the Lord's Supper. The *preparatory service* which is held every time the Lord's Supper is to be celebrated in our church is held to assist the communicants in their preparation for a *salutary use* of this holy Sacrament. God grant that every one of us may always approach the Lord's Table well prepared! Amen.

Twenty-First Sunday after Trinity.

John 5, 1—9.

After this there was a feast of the Jews; and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep-market a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches. In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water; whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had. And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years. When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, He saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole? The impotent man answered Him, Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool; but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me. Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk. And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked.

“A friend in need, is a friend indeed.” A true friend is a very precious gift of God. Friendships, therefore, should be diligently cultured by us with the greatest care, for it is not so easy to gain a true friend, as it is to lose him. A beautiful structure, months, perhaps years, in building, may be destroyed by flames in a very short time. A forest of many years growth may soon be leveled by a fire which has passed beyond control. Friendships which have been years in forming may be ruined in a fit of anger, by an uncontrolled tongue, or in a thoughtless moment by a careless remark.

At a social gathering the conversation once drifted to the subject of Friendship. One said: “I believe a friend may be likened to a soft bandage and a soothing ointment for the cuts and bruises of life.” Another said: “A friend is a golden link in the chain of life.” Still another said: “A friend is a vine that clings to us and hides the discrepancies and rough places of life.” After a while the conversationists came to speak about their *best* friend. Finally, when they had spoken for some time, telling each other whom they considered their best friend, an old Christian gentleman said: “The best friend of all is *Jesus*, who said, ‘Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend’ (John 15, 13).”

Indeed, the old Christian gentleman told the truth, for Jesus is the best friend of all suffering, sinful men. That this is true,

we see also from our text, for in it the Evangelist John holds up to our view Jesus as our best friend. In accordance with our text, and by the assistance of the Holy Spirit, let us, then, now consider the indisputable fact, —

That Jesus is the Best Friend of Suffering, Sinful Mankind.
As such He became known,

1. *To the impotent man who had been sick for thirty-eight years.*
2. *As such, according to God's will, all people should learn to know Him.*

1.

St. John tells us in our text: "*After this there was a feast of the Jews; and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep-market a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches. In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water; whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had. And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years.*"

Almost a year before, during the feast of the Passover, Jesus had been at Jerusalem. On His way back to Galilee, He came through Samaria. At Jacob's Well He met a Samaritan woman, and told her how she and all other poor sinners could be eternally saved. The woman went into her home town and told the people that she had seen and spoken to Jesus of Nazareth, of whom she was convinced that He was the true Messiah. Then her townspeople went out to Jesus and implored Him to stay with them. And Jesus staid with them for two days. Many of the Samaritans became converted. Then Jesus left and came to Cana in Galilee, where He had turned water into wine. While He was there, a nobleman from Capernaum came to Him, imploring Him to come to his sick son, who was at the point of death. Jesus went with him and healed his son. After these happenings Jesus went back to Jerusalem to attend one of the Jewish feasts, as St. John tells us in our text. This feast was, most probably, the feast of Purim.*

* The feast of Purim was celebrated just a month before the Passover. It was celebrated in commemoration of the liberation

But that was not the only reason why Jesus went up to Jerusalem. He went up also for the purpose of revealing Himself to the Jerusalemites as the true Messiah by preaching the Gospel and by performing great miracles.

St. John tells us in our text that near the Temple, at the sheep-market, there was a pool which the Jews called Bethesda. Around this pool there were five porches or vestibules in which lay many sick people on their cots, waiting for some one to take them into the pool whenever it began to bubble, for the first sick person, who would get into the water after it moved, would be healed of his sickness. Among the sick there was a man who had been there thirty-eight years, for we read in our text: *"And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years."* What did Jesus do? St. John tells us: *"When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, He saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole? The impotent man answered Him, Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool; but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me."*

Indeed, it was a sad sight to see so many sick people lying there, and the saddest of all the cases was that of this man who had been sick for thirty-eight years. Most probably he had the palsy, for he could hardly walk. The poor sufferer had been keenly disappointed all these many years, as he never had been able to get into the pool first after the moving of the water. He was hoping against hope. Jesus knew of this poor sufferer, even before He came to Bethesda, and it was His will to heal him. That is the reason why He had come to the pool.

What did Jesus therefore do? He healed the poor sufferer. And how did He do it? Did He wait until the water in the pool began to bubble, and did He carry the poor sufferer into the pool after the angel of the Lord had moved the water? No, not at all; for St. John tells us in our text: *"Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk. And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked."*

Jesus healed this impotent man by the power of His word. Thus He proved that He is more than a mere man; that He is

of the Jews from the thralldom of their enemies through Queen Esther. See: Esther 9, 21. It was a joyous festival, like that of the Tabernacles.

in deed and in truth the very Son of God. And, furthermore, He proved that He was the very best friend the poor sufferer had. Indeed, the Friend in need!

But Jesus did not only heal this impotent man of his physical disease, but also of his spiritual disease, of his sins, for in the fourteenth verse of this chapter we read that Jesus said to him: "Behold, thou art made whole; sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon thee."

Yes, Jesus is the best friend of all poor sufferers, of all sinners. What He did then and there, He does to this very day. Ordinarily He heals the sick through means. He healed many of those sick people, lying around the pool of Bethesda through the water of the pool. That is what He does even now. Many sick people are cured through waters into which Jesus has put healing powers. You all are aware of the fact that thousands upon thousands of people annually are being cured of their diseases through the waters of certain springs in our own country as well as in other countries. Many others He heals through medicines in which He has put healing powers. But it frequently occurs that He heals people without these means. Many sick people have been given up by the physicians as being incurable, and yet, to the astonishment of all, they become well. Yes, Jesus heals even to this very day whenever He wishes to do so. And also from spiritual diseases, from our sins, He frees us as often as we in all sincerity go to Him and ask Him for forgiveness.

Suppose, my beloved friends, that some one should have told this man who had experienced the help of Jesus, that Jesus was not his best friend. What do you suppose he would have said? Would he not have answered: "Man, you may tell that to others, but you cannot make me believe any such thing! No; I know that Jesus is my very best friend, yes, He is the best friend which poor and sinful men have! I am going to cling to Him in life and in death"? Yes, there are multitudes of people who have experienced the friendship and help of Jesus, and all of them would rather die than deny Him. With the Christian poet they will gladly acknowledge:—

My dear Jesus I'll not leave,
Who for me Himself has given;
Therefore unto Him I'll cleave,
Nor from Him be ever driven,
Life from Him doth light receive:
My dear Jesus I'll not leave.

Jesus I will never leave
While on earth I am abiding;
My full trust He shall receive;
What I have, without dividing,
All to Him I freely give:
My dear Jesus I'll not leave.

St. John tells us in a verse following our text that the healed man told the Jews that it was *Jesus* who had healed him. He wanted everybody to know that Jesus is in deed and in truth the very best friend of all suffering and sinful men,—the Helper of the helpless. He did the right thing, for it is the Lord's will that we should make the fact known to all men that He is their very best friend. Of this I shall now speak to you in the second place.

2.

When Jesus said to His disciples: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature," He wanted them to go and tell all men that He is their best friend, their one and only Savior, and that all those who accept Him as such, that is, all those who believe in Him with all their heart, should not perish, but have everlasting life. We preach the *Gospel*, my beloved fellow-Christians, if we tell people of Jesus' love and kindness, and of His bitter sufferings and death for the redemption of the sinful and lost world, and if we invite them to come to Him and accept Him as their Savior.

To tell all people of Jesus and His work of redemption, is the one great business of the Christian Church, that is, of the Christians. All Christians should be diligent in making Jesus Christ known to all sinful men as their Savior from sin, death, and the power of the devil.

It is a sad fact, however, that not all those who call themselves Christians teach and preach Jesus Christ as the one and only Savior of sinful mankind. Many so-called Christians try to make people believe that Jesus Christ is a stern judge, who would not have anything to do with poor sinners, unless they get some church dignitary to intervene for them with Him, or unless they are successful in getting the saints, especially the Virgin Mary, on their side, who would act as mediators between Jesus and themselves. This false and pernicious doctrine is being taught and promulgated by the Roman Catholic Church especially. It teaches that a poor sinner cannot go directly to Jesus in his

prayers, but that he must have a priest as his mediator, that is, that the priest must first reconcile the sinner to Jesus before Jesus will lend His ear to him, and grant him His help. Or, in other words, it teaches that a poor sinner must first show a letter of recommendation from a Roman priest to Jesus before He will have anything to do with him. That is a terrible doctrine, for it robs a poor sinner of the comfort for his soul which he so much desires. Furthermore, it teaches that, if people do not confess their sins to a priest in the auricular confession, they cannot receive forgiveness of their sins and that they must suffer for their unforgiven sins in purgatory until they have been expiated. Alas! how pitifully the poor people are being duped by *that church*, which claims to be the *only saving church* on earth! Such pernicious, soul-destroying doctrines are promulgated by people who call themselves Christians. Oh, how sad!

We, beloved fellow-Christians, have the true Bible doctrines, and it is our sacred duty to teach and preach them to all sinful men, so that all become aware of the blessed fact that Jesus is the best friend poor sinners have, and that He is the one and only Savior from sin, death, and damnation; and that He gladly accepts every one who comes to Him with a penitent and believing heart. He will not cast out any one who comes to Him, for He Himself has promised: "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out." John 6, 37. Yes, He invites all poor sinners to come to Him, for He says: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Matt. 11, 28.

Jesus will never break His promise and, therefore, all poor sinners who go to Him will not be put to shame, for He will gladly accept them. It matters not, my beloved friend, how great and manifold your sins may be, if you will only come to Jesus with a penitent and believing heart, He will forgive you all your sins. Just think of King David! David had fallen into terrible sins, for he had committed murder and adultery, but what did the gracious Lord do when he confessed his sins with a truly penitent and believing heart? He forgave him all his sins. Look at the malefactor hanging at the right side of Jesus on Mt. Calvary! Hardly had he penitently said to Jesus: "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom," when he received the assurance from the best Friend of all poor sinners: "Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise." Luke 23; 42. 43. And what did the best Friend of poor sinners do when

His Apostle Peter, after he had thrice denied Him before men, went out and wept bitterly over his sins? Jesus forgave him his sins and again numbered him among His beloved apostles.

Yes, even from the weakest in faith, Jesus will not turn away, as we see from our text. He accepted the impotent man, and thus He will do to all those who believe in Him. He will strengthen their weak faith, so that they will go away rejoicing, and confess Him to all men, even to His enemies.

O thank God, my beloved friends and fellow-Christians, that we have such a Friend! Go tell every one that Jesus is his very best friend, and his only Savior from sin, death, and the power of the devil! To all whom you cannot reach personally, tell these glad tidings by sending out preachers and missionaries in your stead. This you can do by supporting the Christian missions. Therefore do all you can by word and deed that Jesus, the great Savior of all poor sinners, may be made known to all who know Him not. Then, beloved fellow-Christians, you are doing the grandest work you possibly can do, for Jesus Himself has said: "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3, 16. This God grant for the sake of our best Friend and Savior! Amen.

Twenty-Second Sunday after Trinity.

(Reformation)

2 Cor. 4, 13.

We, having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken,—we also believe and therefore speak.

On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther, Doctor of Divinity, Professor of Theology, and preacher at the Castle-Church in Wittenberg, Germany, nailed his 95 theses, or sentences, so famous and so renowned, to the door of said church. It was on the eve of All Saints' Day that Luther began his great work which led to the overthrow of the papacy—once omnipotent in this world—and the reformation of the Church.

The publishing of those 95 theses was not the first testimony of Luther against papal corruptions. Already in previous years he had raised his voice and pen against the flippant John Tetzel, who, in the name of the Pope and bishop of Mayence, had carried on his infamous traffic of selling for money the remission of sins to the superstitious and ignorant people. But by publishing those theses, his controversy with papal Rome became public and general. Therefore we look upon the 31st day of October, 1517, as the birthday of the glorious and God-sent reformation of the Church.

All Lutherans to this day commemorate the birth of the Reformation. The Festival of the Reformation with us Lutherans is a day of praise and thanksgiving to God. And, most assuredly, we have ample reason for such praise and thanksgiving; for God has rescued the nations of the world from the thralldom of the Antichrist, the ungodly Pope, and from a church corrupt to the very core. And as it has pleased God to use Luther as His servant and instrument to carry out His divine work, is it, then, not meet and right that we should honor such a servant of God as Luther was? Of course, we will not play the papist, that is, we will not canonize or worship him, but we are justified in assigning to him one of the brightest places in the roll of the illustrious dead; for Luther was one of the greatest men that ever lived.

Luther was a great man in many respects. He was one of the foremost thinkers of all times; he was one of the most learned

the world has ever known,—even the princes of learning, Philip Melancthon and Erasmus Rotterdamus, acknowledged him to be such; he was one of the greatest orators that the world has ever had; he was a poet, composer, and musician of some fame. But most of all, he was the greatest preacher and theologian since the days of the great Apostle St. Paul. Permit me, therefore, to invite your devout attention to the following fact:—

That Luther Was the Greatest Preacher and Theologian Since the Days of St. Paul.

This fact is attested,

1. *By his great faith;*
2. *By his fearless testimony.*

1.

Our text, beloved friends, is found in the Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians. St. Paul took those words from Psalm 116. He says in our text: "*We, having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken,—we also believe and therefore speak.*" With these words St. Paul holds up the great faith of David to the Corinthians and all true Christians as a model faith. And, indeed, David was a man of heroic faith, as his whole history proves. David was a true child of God at the time he wrote his Psalms, for he himself says that he was "the pen of a ready writer." (Ps. 45, 1). David was a child of God; but he was not God's child by nature. St. Paul also, like David, wrote by inspiration of God, he also was a child of God; but he was not God's child by nature. By nature, David, St. Paul, and all others who became true Christians, came to be such by the grace of God, through faith in the Savior Jesus Christ. As God's dear children they manifested great faith.

Thus, also, it was with Luther. He, too, was a child of wrath by nature; but he, too, by God's grace, was made a true child of God. He was baptized in his infancy, and through Baptism he became God's child; for it is written: "As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." Gal. 3, 27. But Luther found no nourishment for his faith in the Roman Catholic Church; no, he rather lost his faith in the jungle of papistic superstition, heresy, and idolatry. Realizing that all men are transgressors of God's Law, and, therefore, under God's wrath and condemnation, he became terrified, and knew not what he

should do in order to receive the forgiveness of his sins. Notwithstanding the fact that he had received the degree of Master of Arts in 1505, and had been ordained a priest in 1507, moreover, though he had even received the degree of Doctor of Divinity from the faculty of the university at Wittenberg in 1512, he knew not how a sinner could obtain the remission of his sins. It is true, the passage from the Book of Habakkuk reading: "The just shall live by his faith," chap. 2, 4, had made a deep impression upon him; however, for the time being he could not grasp its full meaning and import. But the hour of his gracious deliverance came when he, in 1515, lectured to his students on the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans. He, then, by the grace of God, came to a right understanding of the cardinal doctrine of the Bible, the justification by faith in Christ Jesus. He himself writes: "Now I was made glad, for now the whole Scripture, yea, heaven itself, was opened unto me."

The right doctrine of justification by faith in Jesus Christ is the key to the whole Bible. Having found this key, he diligently used it himself and also gave it to his students and many preachers for their own spiritual welfare as well as for the welfare of thousands of others. Now the light of heaven had been restored to the Church which the Roman hierarchy had placed under a bushel.

It was Luther's *faith* that prompted him to raise his voice and pen against the infamous traffic of John Tetzel. It was his faith that moved him to nail his 95 theses to the door of the Castle-Church at Wittenberg, October 31, 1517. It was his faith that gave him unsurpassed courage to burn the papal bull of excommunication against him, December 10, 1520, in the presence of the professors and students at Wittenberg, imploring them, to forsake the ungodly Pope and the many heresies of the Roman Catholic Church if they cared to save their immortal souls from eternal damnation. It was his faith that filled his heart with superhuman fortitude to remain firm and steadfast in his convictions, and not retract his Bible-teachings, when he, April 18, 1521, before the august Diet at Worms, concluded his renowned defense with these memorable words: "Unless I am convinced by proofs of Holy Scripture or by conclusive arguments, I will not retract anything; for my conscience is bound by God's Word, and it is neither safe nor right to do anything against conscience." And, glancing over the august assembly, on whose will his life

hung, he added in deep solemnity those immortal words: "Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise. So help me God!" The papists raved, and they sought to destroy his life. His Elector, Fredrick the Wise, had him taken to the Wartburg Castle for safekeeping. There Luther remained for ten months, translating the New Testament into the German language and commencing his postils on the Gospel-lessons. Though being under the ban of the Pope and the interdict of the emperor, Luther left his place of safety and went to Wittenberg, teaching and preaching the Word of God. It was his *faith* that gave him strength and courage to remain steadfast in his work even to his death, February 18, 1546. Time does not permit, otherwise I should cite other instances of the most eventful and useful life of this greatest preacher and theologian since the days of the great Apostle St. Paul.

2.

St. Paul says in our text: "*We, having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken,—we also believe and therefore speak.*" Because St. Paul believed, therefore he spoke. St. Paul was a true Christian, a true believer of the Word of God. All true believers of God's Word will also speak out what they believe; they will give an account of the faith that is in them, by word and deed. So it always has been, and so it always will be. Thus it also was with Luther. He was a courageous and noble confessor of the Bible truths.

Luther had been an ardent admirer of the Pope and a devout member of the Roman Catholic Church, until God delivered him from the error of his way.

The papal system is the most covert hypocrisy of all human devices. The papal religion is essentially the religion of pagan priesthood. There is to this very day but one means that is able to redeem men from Roman Catholic or papistic priestcraft, and this one means is the Word of God as it is revealed in the Holy Scriptures. Luther conquered papal Rome through this means. Without the Bible it would have been impossible for Luther or any one else to unfrock the papal system. With faith in his heart and the Bible in his hand, Luther testified against papal Rome. When Luther rose, "the heart of the Church was in a state of fearful decay. The gospel of man had displaced, and almost vanquished, the Gospel of God. Christianity, which started as a

proclamation of salvation by grace through faith, had become transmuted into a system of degrading works."

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that man is not saved by grace alone, but also by his own merits. Against this false doctrine, Luther testified. He taught with the Bible that man is saved by grace only, and that he is justified before God through faith in Jesus Christ, the Godman, the Redeemer of the sinful and lost world. And this is Bible truth; for it is written: "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast." Eph. 2, 8. 9. And again it is written: "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3, 16.

The Roman Catholic Church has robbed the laymen of the right administration of the Lord's Supper, as it gives them the consecrated bread only, withholding from them the cup—the officiating priest drinking for them; yea, the host or wafer is held up by the priest for adoration. Against this false, idolatrous, and blasphemous doctrine, Luther testified. He taught with the Bible that this holy Sacrament should be received in both kinds, and that the bread and wine are not changed into the body and blood of Christ, but that in, with, and under the consecrated bread and wine the communicants receive Christ's true body and blood in a sacramental manner for the remission of their sins and the strengthening of their faith. And this is Bible doctrine; for it is written: "And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take eat; this is My body. And He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is My blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." Matt. 26, 26—28.

The Roman Catholic Church has utterly corrupted the Bible doctrine of confession and absolution. It teaches that a person receives remission for those sins only which he confesses to a Roman Catholic priest in the auricular confession, and that he must suffer the pangs of purgatory for the rest; but that by buying indulgences, the arrest in purgatory may be shortened. Against these false and soul-destroying doctrines, Luther testified. He taught with the Bible that "the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1, 7). Luther taught with the Bible that it is not necessary to confess one's sins

to any priest, but that confession to God is sufficient; for it is written: "I acknowledged my sins unto Thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." Ps. 32, 5. And again it is written: "Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healed all thy diseases." Ps. 103, 1—3.

The Bible knows nothing of a purgatory; for it teaches *two* places only in the hereafter, heaven and hell. It is written: "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth." Rev. 14, 13. The rich man, when he had been compelled to leave this world, lifted up his eyes in hell, being in torments; Lazarus, who died in the Lord, was carried into Abraham's bosom in heaven as soon as he had died. (Luke 16, 19—31.) Yea, it is written: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." Mark 16, 16.

In the Roman Catholic Church the departed saints are considered mediators between God and the sinner, and, consequently, are called upon for help in all kinds of physical and spiritual distresses. Against this mode of idolatry, Luther testified. He taught with the Bible that neither angels nor saints, but God alone must be called upon, and that He alone must be worshiped; for it is written: "Thou shalt worship the Lord, thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve." Matt. 4, 10. (See also Is. 63, 16.) And again it is written: "There is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." 1 Tim. 2, 5. Not angels, not saints, not popes, not bishops, not priests are mediators between God and men, but Jesus Christ, and none other.

From the days of Gregory VII, at the close of the eleventh century, to the time of Luther, in the sixteenth century, the Pope was the mighty ruler of both church and state. The mightiest kings and emperors did not dare to disobey the Pope's orders, whether they pertained to secular or spiritual matters. Princes, kings and emperors were only the ready tools and fools of the popes or of the Roman Catholic hierarchy. Against the practices of popes, cardinals, bishops, and priests of the Roman Catholic Church, Luther testified, and his testimony was heard by the whole civilized world. What princes, kings, and emperors did not venture to do, Luther did. He fought the Roman hierarchy and he slew the Roman dragon with the two-edged sword, the Bible,

which he had found chained in the library of the university at Erfurt. Luther restored to the civil governments their God-given place and authority, which the Roman hierarchy had taken away from them. It is to Luther's testimony and work that the world owes its political and religious liberty. It was Luther who taught a pope- and priestridden world that it is written: "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's." Matt. 22, 21. It was Luther who also taught the Church that it has but *one Lord*, Jesus Christ, and that there is but *one authority* by which all questions of faith and life may be, yea, must be, decided, and that this one and only authority is the Word of God, the Bible.

Let us, then, most beloved friends, honor Luther, whom God in His wisdom saw fit to become the great Reformer of the Church! Let us not grow weary in giving glory and thanks to God for His kindness which He manifested for His people in raising up the great Reformer of the Church!

"And let the Pope and priests their victor scorn,
Each fault reveal, each imperfection scan,
And by their fell anatomy of hate
His life dissect with satire's keenest edge;
Yet still may Luther, with his mighty heart,
Defy their malice." (Seiss.)

I close with the words of St. Paul in our text: "*We also believe and therefore speak.*" Yea, God give us a portion of Luther's faith and courage, so that we may also speak and defend the truth as it is revealed unto us in His Word! Amen.

Twenty-Third Sunday after Trinity.

Mark 12, 13—17.

And they send unto Him certain of the Pharisees and of the Herodians to catch Him in His words. And when they were come, they say unto Him, Master, we know that Thou art true and carest for no man; for Thou regardest not the person of men, but teachest the way of God in truth: Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not? Shall we give, or shall we not give? But He, knowing their hypocrisy, said unto them, Why tempt ye Me? Bring Me a penny that I may see it. And they brought it. And He saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? And they said unto Him, Caesar's. And Jesus answering said unto them, Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. And they marvelled at Him.

Man is the foremost of all visible creatures. Why? Because God Himself has prepared his body, and has given him a rational soul. Man's soul is immortal, while his body is mortal. For this reason God ordained two distinct domains, which we call church and state. The church should look to the spiritual well-being of man, and the state to his physical welfare. The church, according to God's will, should lead sinful men through this perishable world to the world without end. The state should provide for the physical needs of men while they sojourn here in this world. Both, church and state, therefore, have very distinct duties to perform. If both would perform their specific duties, they must by all means be and remain *separate*. Therefore our dear Lutheran Church teaches, that the ecclesiastical and civil powers are not to be confounded (Augsburg Confession, Art. 28). This fact has often been overlooked by the various church denominations; even by the Lutheran Church itself in some countries, where it is a state-church. State-churches are not in accordance with the express will of God, for He wants church and state to be separate to the end of time, because they are essentially very different from one another. Christians must therefore give to each its dues. That this is true, we learn from our text. By the assistance of the Holy Spirit, and in accordance with our text, let me now answer the important question:

How Did Jesus Answer the Question: "Is it Lawful to Give Tribute to Caesar?"

He said,

1. *"Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's,"*
2. *"And to God the things that are God's."*

1.

The holy evangelist tells us in our text: *"And they send unto Him certain of the Pharisees and of the Herodians to catch Him in His words. And when they were come, they say unto Him, Master, we know that Thou art true and carest for no man; for Thou regardest not the person of men, but teachest the way of God in truth. Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not? Shall we give, or shall we not give?"*

It was not the first time that the chiefs of the Jews, especially the learned scribes among the Pharisees, tried to catch Jesus in His words. At various times they had tried to entrap Him, but thus far they had utterly failed.

As we learn from the words which precede our text, Jesus had told them His Parable of the Vineyard. The way Jesus upbraided them for their refusal to embrace Him as their one and only Savior, angered them very much. They were bent upon His destruction; they wanted to put Him out of the way. They, however, were afraid to lay hands on Him and kill Him, because the common people sided with Jesus. They felt the sting of Jesus' rebuke in His parable, and being impotent to harm Him, they left Him for the time being, and met in conference to see what might be done. They were of the united opinion that they might snatch a few words from His lips which were directed against Caesar or the Roman government. In order to deceive Jesus they did not go to Him personally, but they sent certain of the Pharisees, who, most probably, were not scribes, and some of the Herodians, that is, some of the bodyguard of King Herod, to Jesus with the question: *"Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not?"* And that Jesus might not misunderstand them, they asked Him: *"Shall we give, or shall we not give?"*

The Jewish chiefs were not at all aware of the fact that church and state should be kept separate. The Jewish Church was a state-church. The church authorities of the Jews in those days, especially the highpriest, was nominated for his office by the Roman governor of Judea, and then appointed by Caesar himself. Every Jewish highpriest in the days of Jesus was indebted to the Roman governor and emperor for this very reason, and, therefore, was nothing less than a willing tool in Caesar's hand. This

explains why even Sadducees were highpriests in those days. The Jews were not at all satisfied with things as they were, but they could not have their own ways in these matters, because they were subject to the Romans. They, of course, paid their tribute money to Caesar, but this they did very reluctantly. Perhaps Jesus would tell them not to pay any tribute money to the Romans; and if He should do that then they could easily have Him arrested as a rebel against the Roman government, and thus get Him out of the way. But, my beloved friends, they were great fools, for they ought to have known that they could not catch Jesus. They had tried to do that so often and they always had failed. But they had learned nothing whatsoever from their failures. What did Jesus say to those men who asked Him whether or not it were lawful to give tribute to Caesar? He said: "Why tempt ye Me? Bring me a penny,* that I may see it." They did as Jesus commanded them to do. Then Jesus, taking the penny in His hand, held it up to them, saying: "Whose is this image and superscription?" The image of the Roman emperor was on the coin, and they answered: "Caesar's." Then said Jesus unto them: "*Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.*" When they heard that they marvelled at Him; they were stunned, and they went away.

Jesus always was a very loyal citizen. He at no time and under no circumstances ever spoke one word against the Roman government. When the Jews accused Him before Pontius Pilate of having tried to instigate a rebellion against Caesar, they deliberately lied, for they knew very well that Jesus had not spoken a word against Caesar or the Roman government. He never had endeavored to arouse the Jewish people against their lawful rulers. He never had tried to make Himself a worldly ruler over the Jewish nation. When, for instance, He had fed five thousand men with five loaves of bread and two fishes in a wilderness, and when they tried to make Him their king, He departed from them and concealed Himself (John 6, 15). And again, when a certain man came to Him and said unto Him: "Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me"; Jesus said to him: "Man, who made Me a judge or a divider over you?" Luke 12, 13. 14. And before Pontius Pilate He made this

* The "penny" is the Roman "denarius." In the time of Christ it weighed about 61.3 grains Troy, and was worth about 17 cents of American money.

statement: "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now is My kingdom not from hence." John 18, 36. Jesus wanted to tell the Roman governor that He never had tried to be a temporal or worldly king.

Those men, who had been sent to Jesus, asked Him: "*Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not? Shall we give, or shall we not give?*" What answer did Jesus give unto them? He answered, and said: "*Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's.*" By His answer Jesus proved that He was a loyal citizen. His apostles also were loyal citizens, and they, like Jesus Himself, admonished the people to submit themselves to the laws of their established government and pay tribute to it. St. Peter, for instance, writes his fellow-Christians: "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as the supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of them that do well." 1 Pet. 2, 13, 14. St. Paul wrote to the Roman Christians: "Let every soul (person) be subject unto the higher powers (government). For there is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God; and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same; for he is a minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain; for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience' sake. For, for this cause pay ye tribute also; for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. Render therefore to all their dues; tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor." Romans 13, 1—7. And to Timothy St. Paul wrote: "I exhort therefore, that, first of all supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior." 1 Tim. 2, 1—3. (See also: Titus, 3, 1; Jer. 29, 7.)

Indeed, beloved friends, Jesus and His apostles rendered to

Caesar the things that are Caesar's! And what Jesus and His Apostles did, all Christians must do: they must obey their government in all things as long as they are not bidden to do something which is contrary to God's Law. That is what Jesus meant when He said: "*Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's.*"

But Jesus also told those men, *Render to God the things that are God's*. Of this I shall now speak to you in the second place.

2.

Jesus Himself rendered to His heavenly Father the things that are His. Jesus diligently *prayed* to His Father. Some of His prayers are recorded in the Bible. He often prayed for many hours (Luke 6, 12; Mark 1, 35). Jesus also willingly and cheerfully *served* His Father; yea, He served Him even unto death on the cross. He gave Himself into the most bitter sufferings and a most cruel death that the good and gracious will of His heavenly Father towards a lost sinner-world might be carried out. And, finally, Jesus also *paid the Temple-tax*, which every male Jew, being twenty years old and over, was supposed to pay. While He had been on the Mount of Transfiguration the Temple-tax became due. When He returned with His disciples to Capernaum, a Temple-tax collector asked Peter, whether or not His Master was wont to pay the Temple-tax. Peter told him that his Master always paid. When Peter came into the house in which Jesus was, Jesus asked him whether kings receive tribute from their children or from strangers. Peter answered, From strangers. Then Jesus said to him, "Then are the children free. Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money;* that take, and give unto them for Me and thee." Matt. 17, 26. 27.

It is the will of Jesus that all of His disciples, all Christians, should render to God the things that are God's. Yes, no one can be a true Christian who will not do this will of the dear Savior.

What things, then, are God's? What must we do, if we would render to God that which is God's? In the first place, we must truly *worship* Him. We must not only worship Him with our

* The piece of money was a "stater," equal to four "pennies." According to our money about 68 cents. The Temple-tax amounted to 34 cents, so the "stater" was enough to pay for Jesus and Peter.

mouth and our lips, but with all our heart. If we would worship God with all our heart, we must diligently *pray* to Him. Prayer is an essential part of true worship. God's children at all times and under all circumstances have prayed. No one can be a child of God who does not diligently pray. For what kind of a child would that be, that would not speak to father or mother? Would you acknowledge such a child as your child? Surely not. It is the will of God that all His children speak to Him, and we speak to Him when we pray to Him. He Himself has commanded us to pray, and has promised to hear our prayers. And we should not only pray whenever we are in God's house for public worship, but also in our family worship and private devotions.

But true worship includes also *praise and giving of thanks*. It is God's will that we should praise Him for His wonderful works and for His bountiful goodness, which we experience daily. We should sing doxologies unto him. In many passages of Holy Writ we are enjoined to give thanks unto the Lord, because He is good, and because His mercy endureth forever. True worship consists in prayers and supplications, and in songs of praise and thanksgiving, in our private, family, and public worship. If we are negligent in attending public worship, or in our private devotions and family worship, we do not render to God the things that are God's. The Lord says by the mouth and pen of King Solomon: "Give Me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe My ways." Prov. 23, 36. God wants our *heart*, our *whole* heart. Who-soever worships Him only with his mouth and lips is not at all His child, but a downright hypocrite; he does not render to God the things that are God's.

There are many people who call themselves Christians, disciples of Jesus Christ, and yet they do not willingly and cheerfully give to God of their substance for the maintenance and extension of His blessed kingdom. They are very punctual in paying their taxes to their government,—and that every true Christian will do, yea, must do,—but these very people do not give to God in proportion as He has prospered them. For the kingdom of God, that is, for church, school, missions, and benevolent purposes they do not give any more, often, perhaps, not even as much as poor Christians do. And if you would tell them that they are not rendering to God that which is God's, and that therefore they are not good Christians, they would become very much insulted. But the fact is that they do not render to God

the things that are God's. Such people are good *citizens*, but not good *Christians*. Rich church people, if they do not pay by far more towards the maintenance and extension of God's kingdom than the poor do, are not rendering to God the things that are God's, and it is their fault that the work of the Church is so much handicapped and crippled. May God have mercy upon them and permit them to see and remedy the wrong of which they make themselves guilty! May He give them a willing and cheerful heart and an open hand for His business!

In some Christian congregations a taxing of members has been introduced in order to raise the necessary moneys for the current expenses. Shame upon that congregation that resorts to such extremes! Such a congregation is proof for the sad fact that many of its members are not rendering to God the things that are God's. Again, many a congregation cannot raise the necessary moneys for its upkeep unless it gives bazaars, suppers, picnics, yea, even gambling parties. Such a congregation is proof for the sad fact that many of its members have neither true faith, nor love for Him who gave them everything, and even His only-begotten Son into bitter sufferings and cruel death that they might be redeemed from sin, death, and damnation. Yes, such a congregation is proof for the sad fact that its spiritual decay has already set in, that it is rapidly nearing spiritual death.

May God in His great love and mercy give unto every one of us true faith in Him, then, beloved friends, we shall at all times willingly and cheerfully render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's! This God grant for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Trinity.

Luke 17, 26—37.

And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of Man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the Flood came, and destroyed them all. Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded, but the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed. In that day, he which shall be upon the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away; and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back. Remember Lot's wife. Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it. I tell you, in that night there shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left. Two women shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two men shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. And they answered and said unto Him, Where, Lord? And He said unto them, Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together.

We are again nearing the end of a church year. The last Sundays of a church year remind us of the coming of the Lord unto judgment, of our own death and resurrection, and the Final Judgment.

The Holy Scriptures speak of a *threefold* coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. They speak of His coming in His Word and Holy Sacraments; of His coming into the flesh by His incarnation; and of His coming on the last day of this world. Of His coming for the Final Judgment on the last day of this world, Jesus speaks in the text which I just have read. In the same He describes the last period of this present world. He tells us what kind of days they will be, and He admonishes us to make due preparation for our ultimate salvation and diligently watch for His coming. What He says in our text is intended for our instruction and warning. There cannot be the least doubt about it, beloved friends, that we are now living in the last days of this sinful and wicked world. In accordance with our text, and by the gracious assistance of the Holy Spirit, let me now direct your attention to:—

The Last Days of this World as They are Described by Jesus Himself in Our Text.

He describes them,

1. *As days of worldliness, wickedness, and impenitence;*
2. *As days which ought to remind us of His coming to judgment;*
3. *As days which we should improve for our ultimate salvation.*

1.

The dear Savior begins our text, saying: "*And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of Man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the Flood came, and destroyed them all. Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot: they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; but the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed.*"

Jesus says that the last days of this world shall be like unto the days of Noah and Lot. What manner of days were those days? This question is answered in the Bible. The Book of Genesis tells us that the people in those days were given to *unrestrained worldliness, wickedness, and impenitence*. Jesus mentions things which in themselves are not sinful; for it is not a sin to eat, to drink, to marry, to buy, to build; but when He mentions these things He wishes to tell us that the people in those days thought of nothing else than these very things, and therefore they also lived in all kinds of shame and wickedness. St. Paul draws a very accurate picture of the worldlings and ungodly, when he says of them: "Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things." Phil. 3, 19. This is a true picture of the people living in the days of Noah and Lot. They did only that which is wicked in God's sight, which God hates. God tried to save those people, for He raised up great preachers. All the holy patriarchs of those days preached repentance unto their fellow-men, but mostly to no avail. The greatest of all preachers in those days before the Flood was Noah. He was a faithful minister of God. He did what God told him to do: he preached repentance to his ungodly fellow-men. He pleaded with them, and showed them the wrath of God over sin, and told

them that God would surely punish them in time and in eternity, lest they would truly repent. He told them that God would destroy them, unless they turned to Him in true repentance. He said, that God in His great anger would send a great flood unless they would repent. He also told them of God's great mercy and loving kindness which He had manifested toward sinful men by giving them the gracious promise of the Savior, and he invited them to come to that blessed Savior and be eternally saved. But to no avail. They would not listen to his entreaties. Though God in mercy granted unto them a long period of grace, not less than one hundred and twenty years, none of them repented. They kept on defying Jehovah by their unbelief, worldliness, wickedness, and impenitence. And finally the Flood came, and destroyed them all.

Thus it was also in the days of pious Lot. The people of Sodom and Gomorrah, and other cities, would not listen to the entreaties of this pious preacher of righteousness. The more he pleaded with them, so much the more they vexed his pious soul by their worldliness and wickedness. They thought only of the things and pleasures of this world, and they gave themselves up to these sinful things. They detested repentance and righteousness. Lot's preaching was in vain. Not one soul did repent. Even the grooms of his two daughters would not listen to his earnest entreaties. All that the people longed for and all that they coveted was worldly, sinful amusements, unrestrained merry-making, and temporal enjoyment. And thus they continued in their unbridled worldliness, wickedness, and impenitence until the day Lot left Sodom, and all of them were destroyed by fire and brimstone (sulphur), which fell from heaven and consumed them.

Thus it is *today*, my beloved friends. Most people, even most of those people, who call themselves Christians, are worldly-minded. They crave only the things which pass away, and labor only for the meat that perishes. They have no longing for the spiritual and heavenly gifts and blessings which God promises to them in His holy Word. Most people in our time are money-mad, fashion-mad, and pleasure-mad, and, therefore, they think only of the perishable things of this world. There are now more Bibles, and more preachers and teachers of God's holy Word in the world than there ever were; but most people do not pay any attention to the Word of God which the servants of God are teaching and

preaching. The Word of God is now being taught and preached in almost all languages of men, but the divine services in the churches and chapels are attended by comparatively few, whilst the houses of worldly and sinful amusements, that is, the dance halls, theatres, and lewd picture-shows are filled to overflowing. And many of those people who wish to be regarded as true Christians, take delight in these worldly and sinful amusements. How is that possible, beloved friends? The dear Savior gives the correct answer in our text, when He says: "*As it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be in the days of the Son of Man.*" From the four quarters of the globe we get the most disheartening reports by Christian travelers. We are told, that even in the war-stricken countries of Europe, where most people lack the very necessities of life, the houses of sinful amusements are overcrowded. All unite in their reports that everywhere there is being found unbridled worldliness, wickedness, and impenitence. And in our own country the craze for unrestrained worldliness and wickedness is increasing by leaps. What does all this mean? It can only mean that we are now living in the last days of this world. The signs mentioned by Jesus in various places of the Holy Scriptures, as signs of the impending catastrophe at the end of this world, are being rapidly fulfilled. Indeed, "The end of all things is at hand!" 1 Pet. 4, 7. It will not be long before the sun shall sink into the western horizon never again to show his face in the morning. Truly, beloved friends, we Christians should look for the coming of our Lord every day, for the day of the Final Judgment is rapidly approaching. Of this fact I shall now speak to you in the second place.

2.

Jesus says in our text: "*Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of Man shall be revealed.*"

In the days of Noah the Lord said unto Noah: "My Spirit shall not always strive with man." Gen. 6, 3. And unto Lot it was said: "Arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters, which are here; lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city." Gen. 19, 15. When God's time of grace and longsuffering had come to an end, He executed His dire threats, for the first world was destroyed by the Flood, and Sodom, Gomorrah, and other cities, were consumed by fire from heaven. God is indeed longsuffering and patient, but He is also holy and just. He does not only ful-

fil His gracious promises, but He also executes His dire threats, for He is also a very determined God. He cannot and He will not let sinners go unpunished, unless they truly repent and amend their sinful lives.*

God never changes; He is always the very same good and gracious, but also the very same determined, holy and just God. Whenever His time is come, He will strike this world in His divine anger, and destroy it. That is what Jesus Himself has said, and He cannot lie, as we very well know. He said: "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away." Matt. 24, 35. He is the almighty Son of God, and with Him nothing is impossible (Luke 1, 37). All power is given Him in heaven and in earth (Matt. 28, 18). Whenever the appointed hour is at hand, the Lord will come to judge the world in righteousness. He has not disclosed unto us His appointed hour, but He did mention different signs, which shall precede His coming. When we therefore behold that these signs are being fulfilled before our very eyes, we can be quite certain that the end of this world is at hand. Jesus says in our text that in *His* day it shall be as it was in the days of Noah and Lot. Thus it is at the present time, as we have already heard. The holy Apostle Paul describes the last days of this world, saying: "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having the form of godliness, but denying the power thereof." 2 Tim. 3, 1—5. These words of the holy Apostle Paul are now being verified before our very eyes. There never has been a time that was like unto our time. All this ought to remind us Christians of the nearness of the Lord's advent to the Final Judgment. And St. Peter wrote concerning the coming of the Lord: "Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the begin-

* "Though the mills of God grind slowly,
Yet they grind exceeding small;
Though with patience He stands waiting,
With exactness grinds He all."—Longfellow.

ning of the creation....But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some man count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God." 2 Pet. 3, 3. 4. 8—12.

Christians, most assuredly, should improve their time which is still granted them by the gracious God for their ultimate salvation. They should be diligent in making due preparations for the coming of the Lord, so that they may be able to receive Him with joy. Of this I shall add a few words in the third place.

3.

Jesus says in our text: "*In that day, he which shall be on the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away; and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back. Remember Lot's wife! Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it. I tell you, in that night there shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken, and the other left.*"

With these words our dear Savior wishes to impress upon His audience the necessity of great *watchfulness*. When He comes, He will come suddenly and unawares. It will be too late then to make due preparation. Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation! (2 Cor. 6, 2). We must improve the time of grace allotted to us for making due preparations to meet Him on that day *before* He appears in the clouds of heaven in company with all the angels of heaven. Before He comes [or before death takes us away], we must embrace Jesus as our one and only Savior, and serve Him in true holiness. The hour-hand of God's time-piece is pointing toward midnight. Any moment the cry may be heard: "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet Him!" Matt. 25, 6. All that have made due preparation

to meet the Lord, He will take with Him into His heavenly mansions; but those who prepared themselves not, will be left. Two sleeping in the same bed, or working together in the same house or field, will be separated. The one, the true believer in Jesus, the true Christian, will be taken, and the other, the unbeliever and worldling, will be left. Therefore the Lord admonishes all Christians, saying: "Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man." Luke 21, 34—36. And again He said: "And what I say unto you I say unto *all*, Watch!" Mark 13, 37. Those, who are bent on enjoying this present life only, and therefore neglect the *one thing needful*, neglect their ultimate salvation, and they will lose their life, that is, they will be eternally damned. But those, who make due preparation for the life that is to come, who first seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness, the true Christians, shall obtain eternal life.

When Jesus spoke the words of our text, some people asked Him: "*Where, Lord?*" They meant to say, Where wilt Thou appear? At what place? He answered them, saying: "*Wheresoever the body (carcass) is, thither will the eagles be gathered together.*" They are everywhere in this world. The Lord will therefore appear in such a manner that He can be seen by all at the same time. St. Paul, therefore, says that He will appear in the clouds of heaven, and all people must appear before His judgment-seat. God grant in His mercy that all of us may be well prepared to meet Him when He comes, so that He may take us with Him into the everlasting mansions not made with hands. Amen.

Twenty-Fifth Sunday after Trinity.

1 Thess. 4, 13—18.

I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

Our text is taken from the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Thessalonian Christians. The great apostle sent this letter to them from the city of Corinth. On his *second mission tour* he had come to the city of Thessalonica from Philippi, where he had faithfully labored for some time, and where he had organized a Christian congregation. He began to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the Thessalonians, and his preaching was not in vain. Many embraced the saving Gospel. But his great success embittered the ungodly Jews and Gentiles, and they began to persecute him. In order to save his life he had to flee. It seems that he remained at Thessalonica about four weeks. During this short time it was impossible for the Thessalonians to learn all the Christian doctrines thoroughly. They had, however, learned that they were lost and condemned sinners, and that Jesus Christ is the one and only Savior of sinners. They had embraced Jesus Christ by true faith. Many other doctrines of the Christian religion were altogether unknown to them, especially those doctrines which treat of the resurrection of the dead, and the transmutation of the living Christians on the Day of Judgment. Whether or not the bodies of the dead should rise again, or whether only those should be eternally saved who would live to see the Lord come in His great glory,—they did not know. It seems that, either by a bloody persecution or by pestilence, many Thessalonians had died. And therefore those Christians who had escaped temporal death began to ask all kinds of questions concerning their beloved ones, who had died in the Lord Jesus. And they became much distressed in their minds, because they could

not answer those vexing questions. When St. Paul heard about their predicament, he wrote them his First Epistle, and in it he instructed and comforted them.

What the great apostle wrote unto the Thessalonian Christians, is intended also for all Christians, and, therefore, also for us. It cannot be denied that we also very often are troubled in our minds by all kinds of questions concerning our beloved ones that have died in the Lord. And, to be sure, the devil is always trying his very best to have us doubt the most comforting doctrines of the Bible concerning the hereafter. Let us, then, now direct our devout attention to the words of St. Paul in our text, and learn what he says in regard to those who have *died in the Lord Jesus Christ*. The subject of my discourse shall therefore be:

St. Paul's Instruction Concerning Those That Have Died in the Lord.

He teaches,

1. *That they are not dead, but asleep in the Lord Jesus Christ;*
2. *That they shall be awakened from their sleep on the Day of Judgment;*
3. *That they then shall be with the Lord for ever and ever.*

1.

St. Paul begins our text, saying: "*But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.*"

Whenever temporal death breaks into a Christian family and takes away one or more of its members, sorrowfulness fills the hearts of those that survive. It cannot be otherwise, for Christians also are human. If they were to lack such sorrowfulness and be and remain unconcerned at the departure of one or more members of their family, they thereby would show that they had no love for their own. Indeed, they would sink below brutes.

Christians weep when one of their beloved ones is taken away by temporal death. And it is not sinful for them to be sorrowful over the demise of their beloved ones. God Himself has planted the love we have toward our own into our hearts. It is His will that we love one another. Therefore we find that God's people always did weep whenever one of their own was taken away by temporal death. Abraham, the "father of all believers," wept when his beloved wife had died. When the young man at Nain,

the only son of a poor widow, had died, his mother wept most bitterly. Yea, we are told by St. John that even Jesus Himself wept at the sepulcher of His friend Lazarus.

But, beloved friends, true Christians do not weep and sorrow over the demise of their beloved ones that have died in the Lord, as unbelievers do, who have no hope. Christians sorrow and weep, but in moderation. The unbelievers and ungodly weep as such that have no hope, and they do it, because they have no hope. Unbelievers cannot have blessed hopes. Why not? Because they believe that temporal death ends it all. They do not believe that there is a life after this present one. They do not believe that there is a reunion of all true Christians after this present life. Because they do not believe what all true Christians believe, therefore they have no hope. Perhaps you have already been witnesses of the sad fact that unbelievers sorrow and weep as such that have no hope. Perhaps you have already heard of unbelievers that have taken their own life at the death of one of their beloved ones. Perhaps you have already seen unbelievers rave like maniacs when one of their own was buried. All this proves that they have no hope.

It is not so with true Christians. They do not weep as those do that have no hope, for true Christians have a blessed hope concerning their beloved ones that have died in the Lord. They know from the Word of God that all those, who have departed this life in the Lord Jesus Christ, are not *dead*, but only *asleep*. Of Lazarus, who had died, Jesus said to His disciples: "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth." John 11, 11. And when He had entered the home of Jairus at Capernaum and found a multitude of mourners chanting funeral hymns, because the only daughter of Jairus had died, He said unto them: "Give place, for the maid is not dead, but sleepeth." Matt. 9, 24. True Christians do not die, but they only fall asleep. They sleep in their graves (Is. 57, 2); they rest from their labors (Rev. 14, 13). It is not mere poetry, but divine truth when a Christian sings:—

I would not live away;
No, welcome the tomb;
Since Jesus had lain there,
I dread not its gloom;
There sweet be my rest
Till He bids me arise
To hail Him in triumph
Descending the skies.

Surely, true Christians, who know by divine authority that those who have died in the Lord, are not dead, but only asleep, cannot sorrow and weep as they do that have no hope.

St. Paul teaches in the second place that those asleep in Jesus shall not remain in their graves forever, but that they shall be awakened from their sleep on the Day of Judgment. Of this I shall now speak to you in the second place.

2.

St. Paul did not only write the Thessalonian Christians: "I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope," but also: *"For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first."*

Indeed, also the bodies of the true Christians will decay and rot in their graves, but they will be raised up out of the dust again, and go forth out of their graves alive. Their resurrection is assured by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, St. Paul says. As the Lord Jesus did not remain in His grave after He had been buried by His friends Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, but rose from death on the third day with a glorified body, so will all those rise with a glorified body who truly believe in Him. This shall take place on the last day of this world, when Jesus comes to judge the quick and the dead. When Jesus comes again He comes in the company of all the heavenly hosts. The holy angels will give forth a great shout which will be heard the whole world over, and one of the archangels, perhaps Gabriel, will blow the trumpet of the Lord, and with a loud voice he will call out: "Ye dead arise!" Then all the dead will come forth out of their graves alive, and the sea and death will give up their dead (Is. 26, 19; Rev. 20, 13; Job 19, 25). Not only those, that have died in the Lord, that is, the true Christians, but *all* the dead, also the unbelievers and ungodly, will be resurrected. But St. Paul speaks only of the resurrection of the true believers in our text, for he wrote his epistle to the Christians at Thessalonica, who were per-

turbed by all kinds of vexing questions concerning their beloved ones that had died in the Lord, and who imagined that they might not be resurrected on the last day. He assures them that their beloved ones, who had died in the Lord, would not only be resurrected from their graves, but that they should be raised up *first*, that is, before the unbelievers and ungodly are resurrected. And he tells them, that he is telling them this as a word of the Lord Jesus. Undoubtedly St. Paul thought of this saying of the Lord: "The hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation." John 5, 28. 29. Those who have done good, were true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, for they proved their faith in Him by good works; but those, who did evil, believed not in Jesus Christ, neither did they love nor serve Him. That all true Christians shall be resurrected with *glorified* bodies, St. Paul teaches with these words: "For our conversation (citizenship) is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself." Phil. 3, 20. 21.

St. Paul also tells the Thessalonians what shall happen unto those Christians that are still alive on the Day of Judgment, for he says: "*Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air.*" Those Christians that are alive on the day of the Lord's coming will not first die, but they will be transmuted, changed at once, that is, their bodies will become glorified, fashioned like unto the Lord's glorious body, and they will be caught up together with the glorified bodies of the resurrected saints or believers to meet the Lord in the air. In his First Epistle to the Corinthian Christians St. Paul writes: "Behold, I shew you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruption must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy

sting? O grave, where is thy victory! The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the Law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Cor. 15, 51—57. And what then? The holy apostle answers in our text: "*And so shall we ever be with the Lord.*" And of this I shall speak to you in the third place.

3.

Yes, beloved friends, there is a blessed reunion awaiting all true Christians in the life which is to come! Those Christians, who were separated here, will be united in heaven in the presence of God and the dear Savior. The eternally saved will know each other there, yea, they will even know those, whom they knew not while they were on this earth. And there will be no separation again, for the saints will be united never to be separated again. And all of them will be blessed forever. Their bliss will not be marred by anything. All trials, tribulations, and needs will be done away with forever and ever. Indeed, a blessed reunion, a blessed estate of the saints in yonder life!

But the greatest bliss of the saints will be that they shall see God from face to face. They often wished, while they were wandering in this world's wilderness, that they could see the dear Savior, who suffered and died for them in order to redeem them from sin, death, and damnation. Now all their wishes are fulfilled forever. They will be with the Lord forevermore, will be with Him in His heavenly mansions, which He went to prepare for them, for St. Paul says in our text: "*And so shall we ever be with the Lord.*" Indeed, great bliss and happiness, the bliss and happiness of the eternally saved!

Who, who would live alway,
Away from his God?
Away from yon heaven,
That blissful abode,
Where the rivers of pleasure
Flow o'er the bright plains,
And the noontide of glory
Eternally reigns:

Where the saints of all ages
In harmony meet
Their Savior and brethren
Transported to greet;
While the songs of salvation
Unceasingly roll,

And the smile of the Lord
Is the feast of the soul!?

Our text closes with these words: "*Wherefore comfort one another with these words.*" Indeed, most beloved fellow-Christians, if we always call to mind what the great apostle has written in our text we shall find true comfort when we must be separated from our most beloved ones here on earth. At the death-beds and graves of our fellow-Christians we can truthfully and joyfully exclaim: "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?...Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!"

May the God of love and compassion give us His Holy Spirit so that we may believe what He tells us in our text. Then, beloved fellow-Christians, we will always find comfort in all our sorrows here upon earth, and true bliss and happiness in the world to come. Yea, this God grant for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

Twenty-Sixth Sunday after Trinity.

Genesis 7, 11—24.

In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, the same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened. And the rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights. In the selfsame day entered Noah, and Shem, and Ham, and Japheth, the sons of Noah, and Noah's wife, and the three wives of his sons with them, into the ark; they and every beast after his kind and all the cattle after their kind and every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind and every fowl after his kind, every bird of every sort. And they went in unto Noah into the ark, two and two of all flesh, wherein is the breath of life. And they that went in went in male and female of all flesh, as God had commanded him. And the Lord shut him in. And the flood was forty days upon the earth; and the waters increased, and bare up the ark, and it was lifted up above the earth. And the waters prevailed and were increased greatly upon the earth; and the ark went upon the face of the waters. And the waters prevailed exceedingly upon the earth; and all the high hills that were under the whole heaven were covered. Fifteen cubits upward did the waters prevail; and the mountains were covered. And all flesh died that moved upon the earth, both of fowl and of cattle and of beast and of every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth, and every man; all in whose nostrils was the breath of life, of all that was in the dry land, died. And every living substance was destroyed which was upon the face of the ground, both man and cattle and the creeping things and the fowl of the heaven; and they were destroyed from the earth. And Noah only remained alive, and they that were with him in the ark. And the waters prevailed upon the earth an hundred and fifty days.

The greatest cataclysm which this world ever experienced since God made it, is described in our text. Our text tells us of the so-called Noachian flood, which occurred about 2,350 years before the birth of our dear Savior. It is generally called the Noachian flood, because it took place during the life-time of the great Patriarch Noah. Infidels deny that there ever was such a great flood as Moses describes in our text, but their denial does not prove anything. We all are aware of the fact that many well established facts are being denied by certain people. It always has been a very easy matter to *deny* facts, but not such an easy matter to *disprove* them.

Not only the great historian and man of God, Moses, describes the Noachian flood; no, the literary remains of India,

Persia, Babylonia, Syria, Egypt, and Greece tell of a great deluge. All this proves that there surely was such a thing as the great Noachian deluge. Even if other ancient people knew nothing whatever of the Noachian flood, we Christians, nevertheless, would believe Moses, for we know that he wrote by divine inspiration. That Moses wrote the truth is evident, for Jesus Himself acknowledges it. Jesus said: "And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of Man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the Flood came, and destroyed them all." Luke 17, 26. 27.

The Noachian flood was an act of God's just anger towards an unbelieving and wicked people, and, at the same time, an act of redeeming love towards righteous Noah and the members of his immediate family. Noah and all of his were redeemed from the taunts and mockery of an ungodly and perverse people. Indeed, the almighty God, the *King of Majesty Tremendous*, came in His just anger to destroy all of those that hated Him and His Word, and that wilfully transgressed His Law. But He also came to save those, that truly believed in Him and served Him willingly and cheerfully.

Like as the Lord destroyed the first world by the Flood, so He will destroy this present world by fire on the Day of Judgment. The Day of Judgment will be a most terrible day for all unbelievers and scoffers, but a day of great joy to all true believers in Jesus Christ, to all true Christians. To these solemn thoughts I now wish to direct your devout attention. The theme for our contemplation shall therefore be:—

Behold, the King of Majesty Tremendous!

He comes,

1. *To destroy the wicked; and*
2. *To redeem the righteous.*

1.

Moses says in our text: "In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, the same day, were all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened. And the rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights. In the selfsame day entered Noah, and Shem, and Ham, and Japheth, the sons of Noah, and Noah's wife, and the three wives of his sons with them, into the

ark; they and every beast after his kind and all the cattle after their kind and every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind and every fowl after his kind, every bird of every sort. And they went in unto Noah into the ark, two and two of all flesh, wherein is the breath of life. And they that went in went in male and female of all flesh, as God had commanded him. And the Lord shut him in. And the flood was forty days upon the earth; and the waters increased, and bare up the ark, and it was lifted up above the earth. And the waters prevailed and were increased greatly upon the earth; and the ark went upon the face of the waters. And the waters prevailed exceedingly upon the earth; and all the high hills that were under the whole heaven were covered. Fifteen cubits upward did the waters prevail; and the mountains were covered. And all flesh died that moved upon the earth, both of fowl and of cattle and of beast and of every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth, and every man; all in whose nostrils was the breath of life, of all that was in the dry land, died. And every living substance was destroyed which was upon the face of the ground, both man and cattle and the creeping things and the fowl of the heaven; and they were destroyed from the earth."

From these words of our text we see that it was not a common rain, nor a common rainy season of forty days. Even that would have been something very extraordinary; but a common rain of forty days and forty nights could not have covered the whole face of the earth with water. No, beloved friends, our text tells us of a veritable *deluge*. The inspired writer therefore says that the "*fountains of the great deep were broken up, and that the windows of heaven were opened.*" That was not at all natural; yea, it was contrary to the laws of nature, — it was a great miracle. The King of Majesty Tremendous had come to destroy the first world by this cataclysm. The waters were so exceedingly abundant that they covered even the highest mountains by more than fifteen cubits, that is, by about twenty-two and one half feet.* "*And all flesh died that moved upon the earth, both of*

* "To think of a partial flood, of a local deluge, with this plain account before us were madness; for if the Deluge, after reaching its crest, stood on the earth for more than one hundred days and the ark did not settle on Mount Ararat until the waters subsided, then it stands to reason that it must have been a great deal higher than 16,000 feet, the height of Mount Ararat, and the

fowl, and of cattle, and of beast, and of every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth, and every man; all in whose nostrils was the breath of life, of all that was in the dry land, died."

Yes, the King of Majesty Tremendous came upon the unbelieving people of the first world in His just anger, because they would not repent of their unbelief and wickedness. God had done everything He could do within the reach of His grace and compassion in order to turn their hearts unto Himself, but to no avail. Noah, the servant of the Lord, preached repentance to them for one hundred and twenty years, but they waxed worse from day to day. Finally God's incomprehensible love and grace was changed into just anger towards an unbelieving and perverse people, and He destroyed them all.

The King of Majesty Tremendous changes not. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebr. 13, 8). He will come once more in judgment, at the end of this present world. He will come in just anger to pronounce the judgment of eternal damnation upon all those who did not accept Him as the God of their salvation, as their one and only Savior. This visible universe He will destroy, — not by another flood of water (Gen. 9, 12—15), but by a rain of fire, for it is written: "The day of the Lord," that is, the Day of Judgment, "will come as the thief in the night; in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with a fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up." 2 Pet. 3, 10.

The people living during the Noachian period knew the exact time of the dire judgment to come, for the Lord Himself gave them a living sign in that great preacher of righteousness, His servant Noah. Noah told them that after a period of one hundred and twenty years of grace the Lord would destroy them, unless they would truly repent of their unbelief and worldliness. Every time they heard the call to repentance out of the mouth of Noah they were reminded of the end, but they only derided and vexed him. They did not believe that Noah's predictions would

fact that the water seeks its own level would alone demand our belief in the universal Flood. Besides, the expression is very general: The mountains were covered; wherever they were on the entire surface of the earth, they were hidden by this mass of waters sent as a punishment by God." Kretzmann, Comm. O. T. I, 18.

ever materialize, or that it should be possible that they could be destroyed by a great flood.

The time of His coming to the Final Judgment the Lord did not reveal unto us in His Word, and therefore, no one can know the exact time of His coming. If, therefore, men arise and say that the Day of Judgment will come in a certain year or on a certain day, we can be sure that they are false prophets, miserable liars. But the Lord Jesus has told us of certain signs which shall precede His coming, for He said: "And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and looking after those things which are coming on the earth; for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory." Luke 21, 25—27. (See also Matt. 24, 29ff.) The King of Majesty Tremendous may therefore come at any time. The day of His coming will be a terrible day for all unbelievers and scoffers, for the Lord will destroy them, both body and soul in hell; they will be forever damned. He will say to them, as we read in today's Gospel-lesson: "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." "And they shall go away into everlasting punishment." Oh, what a terrible lot, the lot of all unbelievers and scoffers! They will be forever damned in hell.

The coming of the King of Majesty Tremendous, however, will be a day of great rejoicing and gladness for all true believers in Jesus, for all true Christians, for unto them He comes—not in anger, but in love; not in order to punish, but to bless in body and soul forevermore. Of this blessed fact I shall now add a few remarks in the second place.

2.

Moses tells us in our text: "*And Noah only remained alive, and they that were with him in the ark.*"

When the time had come in which the Lord wanted to destroy the first world, He commanded Noah to take his wife and his three sons and their wives with him into the ark. And Noah did as the Lord commanded him to do, for we read in our text: "In the selfsame day entered Noah, and Shem, and Ham, and Japheth, the sons of Noah, and Noah's wife, and the three wives of his sons with them, into the ark; they and every beast after his kind and all the cattle after their kind and every creeping

thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind, and every fowl after his kind, every bird of every sort. And they went in unto Noah into the ark, two and two of all flesh, wherein is the breath of life. And they that went in went in male and female of all flesh, as God had commanded him.* And the Lord shut him in." The Lord Himself shut the door in such a way that no man or company of men could open it.

Noah and his family were saved through the water which destroyed all the rest of mankind, because they were in the ark. When the rain began and when it rained for forty days and forty nights incessantly; yea, when even the waters burst forth from the great deep, Noah and all of his had no reason whatever to fear, for they were safe from the great flood. There cannot be the least doubt about it that they rejoiced and were glad because the Lord had saved them, and they glorified and blessed the Lord.

Thus it will be with God's children at the end of this wicked world. When the end comes, that is, when the visible heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and the earth also and all the works that are therein shall be burned (2 Pet. 3, 10); when the Judge of Majesty Tremendous shall appear in the clouds of heaven in all His power and glory, and all the holy angels shall accompany Him; when the unbelievers and ungodly will begin to fear with an exceeding great fear, and when they shall call upon the mountains to fall upon them and the hills to cover them (Luke 23, 30); then, beloved friends, the true believers in Jesus Christ, the true Christians, shall lift up their heads with joy and gladness because their full deliverance is nigh. He, who comes to judge the quick and the resurrected dead, is none other than the dear Savior Himself. He comes to get His bride and to take her with Him into the heavenly mansions which He prepared for her, so that she can

* Unbelievers and scoffers, yea, even so-called preachers of the Gospel, contend that it would have been altogether impossible to house so many creatures within the ark. What was the size of the ark? Dr. Kretzmann says in his Commentary, Old Test., p. 16: "Figuring a cubit at a foot and a half, the dimensions of the ark were 450 feet in length, 75 feet in width, and 45 feet in height. The cubit contents of the vessel thus exceeded 1,800,000 cubic feet, and afforded ample room for the purpose which the ark was to serve, being able, as has been demonstrated, to carry a cargo greater by one-third than any other form of like cubical content."

be with Him forevermore. Indeed, the last day of this world will be a day of great rejoicing for all true Christians, when Jesus comes to get His beloved ones and take them with Him in the blissful abode of the eternally saved,

Where the rivers of pleasure flow o'er the bright plains,
And the noontide of glory eternally reigns:
Where the saints of all ages in harmony meet
Their Savior and brethren transported to greet;
While the songs of salvation unceasingly roll,
And the smile of the Lord is the feast of the soul.

Yes,

And when within that lovely paradise
At last I safely dwell,
From out my soul what songs of bliss shall rise,
What joy my lips shall tell,
While holy saints are singing
Hosannas o'er and o'er,
Pure Hallelujahs ringing
Around me evermore!

Innumerable choirs before the shining throne
Their joyful anthems raise,
Till heaven's glad halls are echoing with the tone
Of that great hymn of praise,
And all its host rejoices,
And all its blessed throng
Unite their myriad voices
In one eternal song.

O happy and joyous day, the Day of Judgment for all true Christians! "He which testifieth these things saith, Surely, I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" Revelation 22, 20. Amen.



